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ISSUE 34
JANUARY 2020
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ROBERT PLANT

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THE TOP 100 ALBUMS OF 2019

FEATURING

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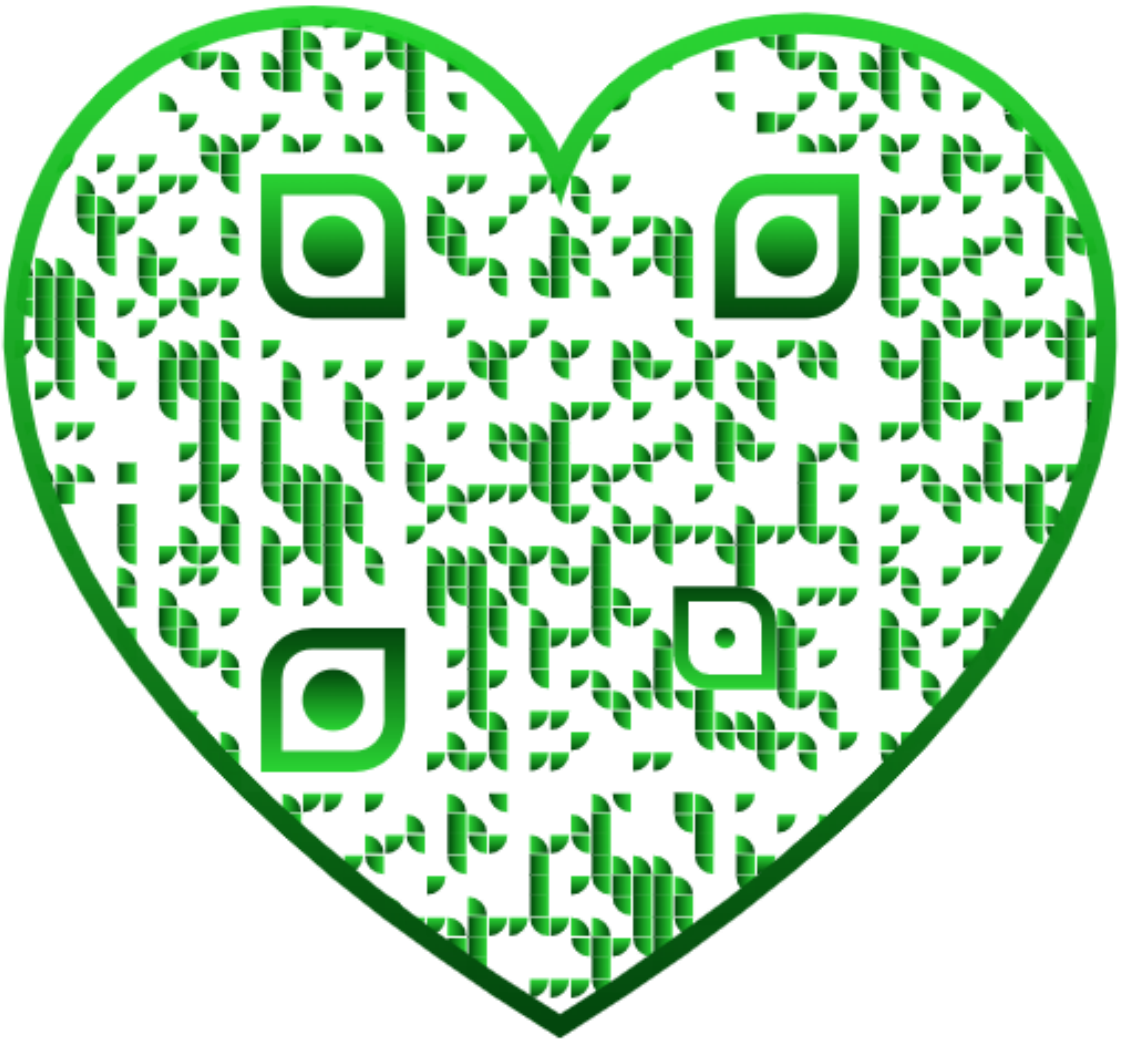

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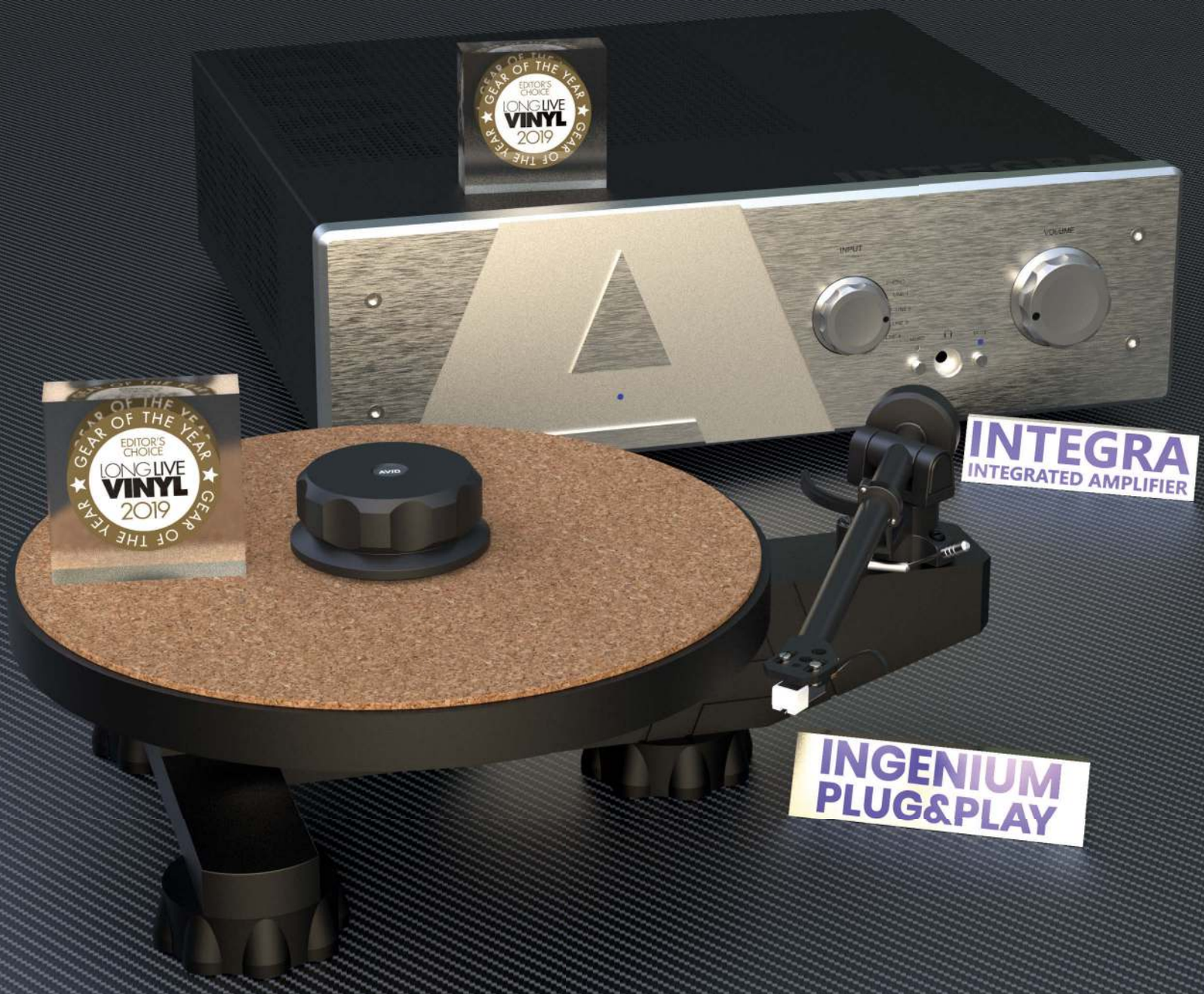

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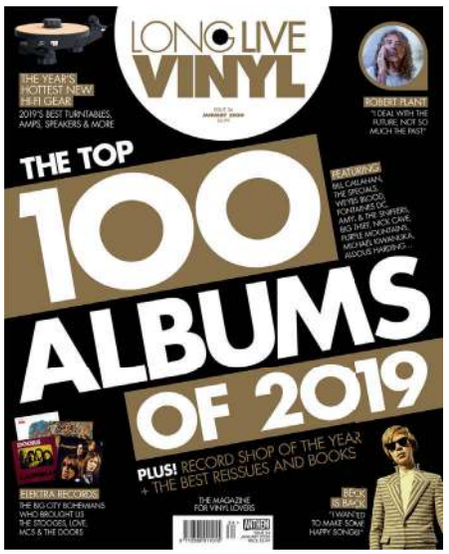

Welcome...

So there goes 2019, kicking and screaming into the annals like an unpopular relative who's outstayed their festive welcome long after the Christmas leftovers have been fed to the dog and only the mini Bountys and orange creams remain in the tin. It's fair to say the final year of the second decade of the 21st century hasn't been a vintage one in the wider world. However, in our vinyl community, there's plenty to celebrate.

Our Top 100 Albums Of 2019 once again show that times of social discord can give rise to brilliant, creative and reactionary music – with the likes of Big Thief, Slowthai, The Specials, Fontaines DC, Richard Dawson and Michael Kiwanuka all producing articulate, angry and yet hopeful responses to the current world order and worsening climate crisis. Of course, our memories of 2019 will be tinged with sadness, and our hearts go out to Nick Cave, whose stunning new album *Ghosteen* is a harrowing account of an event no parent should ever have to come to terms with; and it was desperately sad that David Berman of Purple Mountains took his own life after making some of his finest music. Particularly at Christmas time, we should all remember to look out for those who are alone or in need.

The year also saw a series of revelatory reissues, such as the vast Prince and long-overdue Gene Clark releases. The ongoing good news story of the rebirth of independent record shops is also worth toasting. Record Store Day continues to capture the imagination and more than 10,000 of you voted for our shop of the year. Turn to page 66 to find out who our worthy winners are. While we continue to champion the tireless work of our friends in independent shops, we were also heartened by the return of HMV to the vinyl world. The rejuvenated chain this year opened a massive new Birmingham flagship store stocking 25,000 records, and vinyl is again a major presence in their other UK stores. There are more records on the high street than in a hell of a long time – something few would have predicted 20 years ago. So pop into your local store while you're out Christmas shopping – they deserve your support.

Merry Christmas and thanks for reading.

Gary Walker *Editor*

LONGLIVEVINYL

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR
2019
LONG LIVE VINYL
ALBUMS OF THE YEAR
GHOSTEEN
I AM EASY TO FIND
KIWANUKA
FOALS
THE SPECIALS

GEAR OF THE YEAR
2019
LONG LIVE VINYL
GEAR OF THE YEAR

RECORD SHOP OF THE YEAR
2019
LONG LIVE VINYL
RECORD SHOP OF THE YEAR

PETER HAPAK

LONG LIVE VINYL

elektra

ELLEN VIRGONA MADS PERCH

SUBS OFFER

SAVE MONEY

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LONG LIVE VINYL

The *Long Live Vinyl* team's favourite albums of 2019

GARY WALKER
Eraserland
Strand Of Oaks

GARY TIPP
Purple Mountains
Purple Mountains

TILDA HOWARD
Hot Motion
Temples

ANDY McGREGOR
Closer To Grey
Chromatics

IAN PEEL
Return To Us
The Lilac Time

Meet our expert contributors…

SIMON RAYMONDE
Simon was the bassist and keyboard player in the Cocteau Twins; he's currently in Lost Horizons. He launched the independent label Bella Union in 1997. His label has been home to bands including Fleet Foxes, The Flaming Lips, Midlake, Father John Misty, John Grant, Explosions In The Sky and Lanterns On The Lake. He's also produced many great albums.

JOHN EARLS
In addition to writing about music for *Classic Pop*, *NME* and *The Daily Star*, John Earls was editor of Teletext's Planet Sound for a decade. He also writes about football, spends too much time on Twitter and is delighted that his new hometown in Bedfordshire has a decent record shop. There's even a bus that goes to Luton Town's ground, so his life is essentially sorted.

JONATHAN WRIGHT
Jonathan began writing about music in the late 80s. He's interviewed such singular talents as Shaun Ryder, Edwyn Collins and Richey Edwards. He's written for *The Guardian*, *Classic Pop* and many others. Jonathan edited *Adventure Rocketship! Let's All Go To The Science Fiction Disco*, a book of essays about the interface between geek culture and music.

TERI SACCONE
A veteran music journalist who grew up in New York, Teri voraciously pored over album sleeves as a child, studying studio and songwriting credits. Later, she was sucked into the vortex of the music industry while still at university. A sometimes beauty and fashion writer, besides the aural wonders of vinyl, she loves the aesthetics of album design and artwork.

PETE PAPHIDES
Pete bought his first record at the age of nine and has been a vinyl obsessive ever since, while writing for *Melody Maker*, *Q*, *Mojo*, *Time Out*, *The Times* and *The Guardian*. He is one of the UK's best known music journalists and has also written and presented documentaries for BBC Radio 4 and BBC 6 Music. You can catch him on Soho Radio every Tuesday, 12-2pm.

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On the record

Women On Wax

A new book focuses on over 100 of the best albums by women, as chosen by musicians and industry insiders

Over 100 inspirational albums by women feature in a new book curated by Colleen Murphy, the founder of Classic Album Sundays. *Long Live Vinyl* grabs a quick word.

How did *Classic Albums By Women* come about?
"I wanted to do a special social media campaign for International Women's Day in 2018 and came up with a last-minute idea to invite our friends in the music biz to take a selfie of themselves holding their favourite album by a woman and explain in a few words why the record and artist had such an impact. The response was overwhelming and we ended up getting over 100 entries! After the social media campaign ended, we thought that it would make a great book. Once we got interest from ACC Art Books, we cast a wider net for contributors and voila!"

Was the aim of the book to readdress the balance in terms of recognition?
"Yes, it was purely to redress the balance and also celebrate female creativity. I know that by its very nature, this book is not entirely inclusive, as we are only focusing upon females, so that is why I invited contributors of all genders."

Why did you choose Joni Mitchell's *Blue*?
"I knew I was going to choose Joni Mitchell, as she is one of my favourite artists, but I just wasn't sure which one. *Blue* is one of her most iconic albums and a real turning point in her career. And then, somewhat superficially, I thought I could create a good photo using a blue theme. The bird poo trickling down the upper left-hand corner of the wall was a nice touch."

Did creating the book teach you anything new about women artists?
"I discovered a few new artists, such as Kara-Lis Coverdale and Maja S K Ratkje. I was also inspired to rediscover old favourites like *Dolmen Music* by Meredith Monk."

It seems as though today's music scene is more receptive to female artists than ever…
"There is more affirmative action taking place, which is much needed at the moment. Hopefully, we will one day have a level playing field so this kind of book will no longer be necessary!"

Classic Albums By Women is published by ACC Art Books (£15) and is out now

Discogs TRENDING CHART

THE TOP 10 TRENDING VINYL RELEASES FROM THE DISCOGS COMMUNITY THIS MONTH

10 *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost Pt. 2* Foals
9 *Prequelle Exalted* Ghost
8 *Out Of Season* Beth Gibbons & Rustin Man
7 *Monster* R.E.M.
6 *Alles Ohne Strom* Die Toten Hosen
5 *Leaving Meaning* Swans
4 *Desert Sessions Vol 11 & 12* Desert Sessions
3 *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood OST* Various Artists
2 *Colorado* Neil Young & Crazy Horse
1 *Songs For The Deaf* QOTSA

Official Vinyl Albums Chart NOVEMBER 2019

10 *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood OST* Various Artists
9 *Never Boring* Freddie Mercury
8 *Pony* Rex Orange County
7 *From Out Of Nowhere* Jeff Lynne's ELO
6 *Why Me? Why Not* Liam Gallagher
5 *Abbey Road* The Beatles
4 *KIWANUKA* Michael Kiwanuka
3 *Kind* Stereophonics
2 *Giants Of All Sizes* Elbow
1 *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost Pt. 1* Foals

S.BENNETT

The Selecter

Long Live Vinyl's essential Christmas gifts for vinyl lovers

VINYL COUNTDOWN

£16.99

www.oldcastlebooks.co.uk

Vinyl Countdown follows Graham Sharpe's travels to record shops all over the globe, from Walsall to Warsaw. It's a love letter to the art of collecting. Former *NME* editor Danny Kelly says it all in the foreword: "It's a book about oddballs and old heads, written by one of their number."

AM RECORD CLEANER BOX SET

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www.amcleansound.com

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Work In Progress

GENGAHR

SANCTUARY **LIBERATOR MUSIC** 31 JANUARY 2020

Our new album is... *Sanctuary*

The sessions... For the most part, the songs were crafted in my bedroom. I spent a lot of time alone, working on my computer. On occasion, I'd find a drum sample I liked or another member of the band might send me something they'd been working on. Once these ideas felt formed enough, I sent them to Jack Steadman [Bombay Bicycle Club]. He'd spend a bit of time thinking about the arrangement. It was always exciting getting back those initial demos after Jack had made his tweaks, a glimpse into the future, where these tracks were going to end up. We'd then meet up at Jack's house and go through each part in detail. Once carefully considered, we'd record each part of the demo again. So many great additional parts and ideas were flying around, we'd often find ourselves pulling whole sections apart and starting again. Once we had what we felt was 'the album', we took our recordings to a residential studio in Bude called Propagation House. Every sound went under the microscope and every part had to justify its existence. Every day in the studio flew by.

We worked with... our outrageously talented friend Jack, and James Bragg, who engineered and co-produced our debut album. It felt important to try to recapture the sense of adventure we felt when making our debut, and James was such a big part of that. The album was mixed by Nathan Boddy. He only does amazing albums, so we were extremely flattered he blessed us with his talents and couldn't be happier with what he delivered.

We used... Friendship was the biggest factor in making the album. Having my best friends in the band is something I never take for granted.

We were inspired... A lot of the songwriting was born out of frustration and sadness. Being separated from my girlfriend after she had to leave the country and it not being long after my mum had passed away, it felt like a lot going on. At times, it was hard to be positive, but I think the environment in which the songs were recorded helped breathe hopefulness into the songs.

We learnt... Where there is a will there is a way. We started this pretty much on our own and spent every penny we had making an album that we weren't sure we'd be able to finish. At every stage of the way we have been extremely fortunate the right person has come on board to take it one step further and we're very thankful for all those amazing people who have helped us get it this far.

Playing these songs live... We have already begun planning the live show for our headline tour next year and we are all really excited about being back on the road again.

You'd be surprised to know that... Right at the beginning of the writing of this record my house was broken in to. They stole laptops, jewellery, clothes, everything. But they unplugged and left my hard drive. On that drive was *Everything And More* and a few other songs that found their way on to the record.

Lost Shops

#7 REVOLVER

If you grew up in a small Somerset village in the late 80s, then record shops were in short supply. I wanted to find the sort of record shop I'd read about in the *NME*, so off to our nearest city I went. Allegedly, in Bristol there were record shops aplenty. My favourite, by far, was Revolver Records at the top of Park Street on the Clifton Triangle. Revolver wasn't your average record shop – it had no regular shop window, just a door on the street, unmarked and mysterious. Through the door you went, then up a sloping corridor, with walls covered in gig posters and adverts for band members wanted and then into the shop. Several minutes were usually needed to adjust your eyes due to the amount of cigarette smoke filling the air but there it was, the record shop I'd imagined a record shop to be. It's hard to do it justice now and all the memories have been altered by time's rose-tinted specs, but it was a mad place, full of brilliant characters. It was also full of records that I'd heard about but never seen, particularly reggae, dub and jazz records, that were definitely in short supply in Somerset. Revolver was where I was first introduced to Captain Beefheart, Neil Young, Frank Zappa and Can. Although the doors of Revolver closed in 2000, its reverberations and influence on the city and the people who spent time there are still felt.

Tom Friend (pictured)

JAY WHITEHEAD

Simon says

SIMON RAYMONDE

While 2019 has been an unsettling year in many, many ways, Bella Union's roster of artists has produced some memorable highlights

Only when you look back at a year do you start to see the obvious patterns, threads weaving seamlessly through the tapestry. Maybe everyone else saw them but you did not. But now, with the perspective of review, a bit like when you clean your smudged glasses, a lot more comes into focus.

And so it is with 2019, in one way, one of the ugliest years in recent memory, blighted by the state of the nation and the disappearance of society as I hoped it once but maybe never was. Yet, Greta Thunberg grasped the nettle and took on the world, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Tabata Amaral stood up and told it like it is, Owl Fisher campaigned to create more positive representations of transgender people in the media, Sinéad Burke called out designers of homes to make them more accessible to disability and to clothes designers to make clothing more inclusive. In every corner of this planet, incredible women were at the forefront in trying to create systematic change, and whatever the outcome of the General Election, there seems to be finally some fight left in this old dog. All of a sudden, I see it vividly.

The sisterhood within our own fragile ecosystem at Bella Union has had one helluva year and in something akin to a 'round-up' of my year, I'm going to highlight some of these great stories. Indeed, only three of the 21 LPs we released this year were from male-led artists.

After 22 years of running the label, I am mostly thrilled that the style of our company is still anyone's guess. Some folks will have their say on what kind of label we are, but with a roster encompassing hip-hop, classical, instrumental, grindcore, folk, punk, post-punk, African, electronic, indie guitar pop, dream pop and whatever other daft genres we can come up with, this diversity is I believe our greatest strength.

Signing the jazz/dub collective Kefaya for the album they made with singer Elaha Soroor gave me a huge thrill. *Songs Of Our Mothers* is a collection of old folk songs often performed by Afghan women, now reimagined by Elaha through her own experiences fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, as she explains here "for those women around the world whose image has been erased and whose voice has been forbidden". The album is littered with amazing guest performances by musicians from Italy, India, Iran and Greece who join forces to foster a united vision of stirring musical and political articulation.

The Hannah Cohen album *Welcome Home* is one of the year's absolute best. With two records under her belt, it felt like maybe her moment had finally come, working beautifully here with producer Sam Evian, and it was with excitement that I started to send a few of the key tracks around to the usual suspects in the media, as I always do to stoke the coals a little. Nothing. A few weeks went by and I followed up again, politely of course. Nothing. Was it only me that got this superb LP? I played it to a few close pals and said nothing by way of introduction, you know the just-kinda-stuck-it-on-in-the-car sorta thing, and they all flipped out. OK, phew! I drew an intake of breath and tried a third time of messages around the houses. Nothing. We were by now already working the second track. But then all of a sudden, I got a one-word email back from Lauren Laverne. It was capitalised, too.

I'm mostly thrilled that the style of our company is still anyone's guess

"OBSESSED!" It IS one of those records. Where you feel like a teenager falling in love. Like an addict who cannot get enough. You just find yourself playing certain songs 20 times in a row. With Lauren's unexpected patronage – she played *Dissolving* pretty much every day for about a fortnight I do believe – things started to pick up and her tour with Sam was a delight. His band became her band each night, and the audiences lapped it up.

I don't have enough words per month to give you a review of each album, but I wanted to finish with a love letter to Ezra Furman. The album *Twelve Nudes* arrived in a beautifully garish, even cartoon-ish, sleeve and is a set of songs to knock any apathy right out of you.

The dates Furman just played have been a revelation and put her right up there with some of the most vital artists of the 21st century. And for all my love of the brisk thrash of *Rated R Crusader*s or *Calm Down AKA I Should Not Be Alone*, it is with the song *I Wanna Be Your Girlfriend* I'll sign off this decade of decline. Firstly, you need to know that Ezra Furman writes THE best lyrics if you are feeling awkward of body, unsettled of mind, angry without a voice, and hurting inside. She is there for you. "All my friends are writing their resumes, my responsible friends are applying for jobs, but me, I was considering ditching Ezra and going by Esme. Baby, would you find that so odd?"

Many of us feel displaced, misplaced, we don't feel comfortable in our skin, and society doesn't appear to be comfortable with many of our skins either. Ezra Furman knows that feeling too only too well. And Esme would too.

Bella Union releases 2019 1. Kefaya And Elaha Soroor *Songs Of Our Mothers* **2. Pavo Pavo *Mystery Hour*** 3. Go Dark *Neon Young* **4. Pom Poko *Birthday*** 5. Mercury Rev *Bobbie Gentry's Delta Sweete Revisited* **6. Penelope Isles *Until The Tide Creeps In*** 7. Piroshka *Birthday* **8. Modern Nature *How To Live*** 9. Lowly *Hifalutin* **10. E.b.the Younger *To Each His Own*** 11.The Flamings Lips *King's Mouth* **12. Doomsquad *Let Yourself Be Seen*** 13. Hannah Cohen *Welcome Home* **14. & 15. Soundwalk Collective with Patti Smith *The Peyote Dance* & *Mummer Love*** 16. Jambinai *Onda* **17. Daughter Of Swords *Dawnbreaker*** 18. Ezra Furman *Twelve Nudes* **19. The Soft Cavalry *The Soft Cavalry*** 20. Broen *Do You See The Falling Leaves* **21. Dog In The Snow *Vanishing Lands***

The Completist

PETE PAPHIDES

It's 40 years on from the first album Pete ever bought, and the impact of that vital vinyl purchase is still being felt today

Half the time, anniversaries routinely pass me by before I even register them. But this month, I'll be making an exception. It's 40 years since the release of the first album I ever bought. And, if I was only allowed to keep one record from my collection, that same record – K-Tel's big TV-advertised 1979 compilation *Hot Tracks* – would be the last disc standing. It was my big Christmas purchase that year: 20 songs, 10 per side, housed in a sleeve depicting railway tracks through a blue filter, two of them coloured bright red to signify their titular heat.

Hot Tracks may have cost a fiver, but it did an extraordinary amount of heavy lifting in return, offering a snapshot of a music scene that both responded to and reflected social changes in Britain faster than any other form of popular culture. The second and third songs on the record, by Eddy Grant and Janet Kay, were cases in point. Eddy had arrived in Britain from Guyana as a teenager and formed the Equals, the first interracial rock group to enjoy major success in Britain (soon to be followed by Hot Chocolate, whose *Mindless Boogie* could be found on side two). Eddy's *Living On The Frontline* was a show of roots alignment with Bob Marley and Steel Pulse, but the audacious squelch of that keyboard also anticipated both the beginnings of acid house and reggae's digital transformation into dancehall.

Like Eddy, the creator of *Silly Games* Dennis Bovell was also 12 when he arrived here, not from Guyana but Barbados. Nine years after steering Britain's first reggae band Matumbi to wider prominence, Bovell decided to write a reggae song so irresistible that it couldn't fail to be a colossal hit. And that was Janet Kay's *Silly Games*. These were the first reggae songs I heard, knowing that what I was listening to was reggae.

Other songs on *Hot Tracks* sat at the intersection of disco and Hi-NRG. Some of those were made by dancefloor overlords keeping apace with the times – Giorgio Moroder's presence is detectable on Sparks' *Number One Song In Heaven*. Others were the work of artists not considered cool by the music papers my big brother was bringing home, but being 10, I didn't care about that. Neither did I realise that perhaps I wasn't the intended audience of Village People's *Go West* (and when I found out what it was about, it turned an already emotional song into an unbearably moving one).

Brushing shoulders with Village People and Giorgio Moroder on *Hot Tracks* are disco diversions by older artists who knew they would never have been taken seriously if they'd attempted to get on board with punk. But I didn't care about that either. To this baggage-free pre-teen, the twinkling arpeggiations of Mike Oldfield's *Guilty* will always trump *Tubular Bells*.

Years later, I'd also learn that one of oddball disco opportunists Quantum Jump used to be in groovy 60s lounge outliers The Peddlers. But what was impressive to me in 1979 was the fact that they could sing the word "Taumatawhaka-tangihangakoayauotamateaturipukakapik-imaungahoronukypokaiwhenuakitanatahu"[1] without stumbling or drawing breath.

Other songs on *Hot Tracks* would assist the future me in less niche ways. Take, for instance, two songs which ascended the Top 40 during the preceding summer months and, in doing so, started me thinking about what it must really be like to fall in love. The Korgis' *If I Had You* used the multi-tracked yearning of John Lennon's *#9 Dream* as a vessel in which to launch the perfect defences-down love song. If that Korgis song formed a question – what would happen if the girl of your dreams went out with you? Darts' cover of Gene Chandler's 1962 single *Duke Of Earl* offered up an answer. You're The Duke of Earl, walking through your dukedom, hand in hand, with your Duchess of Earl. Years later, when I met my future wife for the first time, I knew she was the one because these were the two songs that had previewed how it would feel when I met her.

These were the first reggae songs I heard, knowing that I was listening to reggae

Pete Paphides is a music journalist, record collector and broadcaster. Catch him on Soho Radio every Tuesday, 12-2pm

And while I was waiting to become that person, *Hot Tracks* also featured songs that refracted into chords and notes and words the child I was at that moment in time: The Boomtown Rats using the classroom as the dramatic setting of *I Don't Like Mondays*; Racey with a tiny pleading child-man singer who sounded out of his depth contemplating matters of romance on *Some Girls*; and Voyager with their sublimely plaintive non-hit *Halfway Hotel*, a tender exercise in restless escapism that could have sat comfortably on *Hunky Dory* had Bowie thought of it first.

I've never extracted more turntable miles out of a record than I have *Hot Tracks*. It's the musical metric by which I've come to understand the person now sitting here typing these words. When I die, you could cremate me and pass me on to one of those places that turn your ashes into a vinyl record. *Hot Tracks* was the making of this pop obsessive, so if one day, you made a *Hot Tracks* out of this pop obsessive, the circle would be complete.

1. It's Polynesian for "The place where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as 'landeater' played his flute to his loved one."

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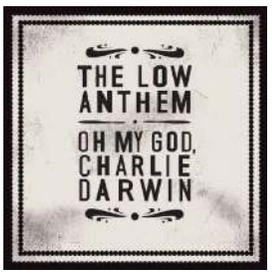
Redinking The Archives

Record shop collective Dinked is dipping its toe into the reissue waters. Rupert Morrison explains

Tell us about the new Dinked Archive releases?
"A big part of Dinked was always intended to be using our voices to fill the gaps in many record collections, all the gems that shouldn't be out of print."

What type of reissues will you be looking at?
"Same process as Dinked really. Is it interesting? Is this edition special? The first few Dinked Archive releases are pretty different, it's exciting to be looking both backwards and forwards."

What was the appeal of *Oh My God, Charlie Darwin* by The Low Anthem as your inaugural release?
"It's just such an excellent record and sounds as weirdly old, new, quiet and ruckus as it did 10 years ago when it arrived like a bolt from the blue. It was really good timing to be chatting with Bella Union, and we love bringing that set of songs to an audience that might have missed them a decade ago."



What other releases are in the pipeline?
"We can't tell you specifically, but looking at releases that are 10, 15, 20 and 25 years old brings up some utterly brilliant years of musical history. 1995, for one, was all killer. Although us shops spend our days listening to the best new music, you've got to dedicate time to knowing your history, the big, the famous and the criminally overlooked. It's important stuff."

10,256

The price in dollars a copy of Röyksopp's limited edition *Melody A.M.* double LP with a cover hand spray-painted by Banksy sold for as we were going to press.

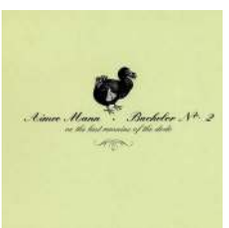
TOTALLY WIRE

Post-punk legends Wire return with their 17th studio album in January. Arriving 40 years into the band's career, *Mind Hive* is out on 24 January through their own label Pinkflag. It's the band's first new material since 2017's *Silver/Lead*. Keep your eyes peeled for an interview with the band in a forthcoming issue.

4 OF A KIND... Flightless birds

ORANGE JUICE
OSTRICH CHURCHYARD
This 'Best Of' released in 1992 on Postcard Records places the flightless African bird in the strip of land surrounding a church. A pleasing combination.

LITTLE FEAT
DIXIE CHICKEN
Little Feat's third album is a laid back funky affair that pays tribute to a non-airbound domesticated fowl hailing from the southern United States.



AIMEE MANN
LAST REMAINS OF THE DODO
Also known as *Bachelor No.2*, Mann's third album references the bones of the extinct flightless bird formerly of the Mauritius islands.

FLEETWOOD MAC
PENGUIN
Mac's seventh album was the first recorded after the departure of Danny Kirwan. It was also their first (and only) to be named after the aquatic flightless bird.

Coming Soon...

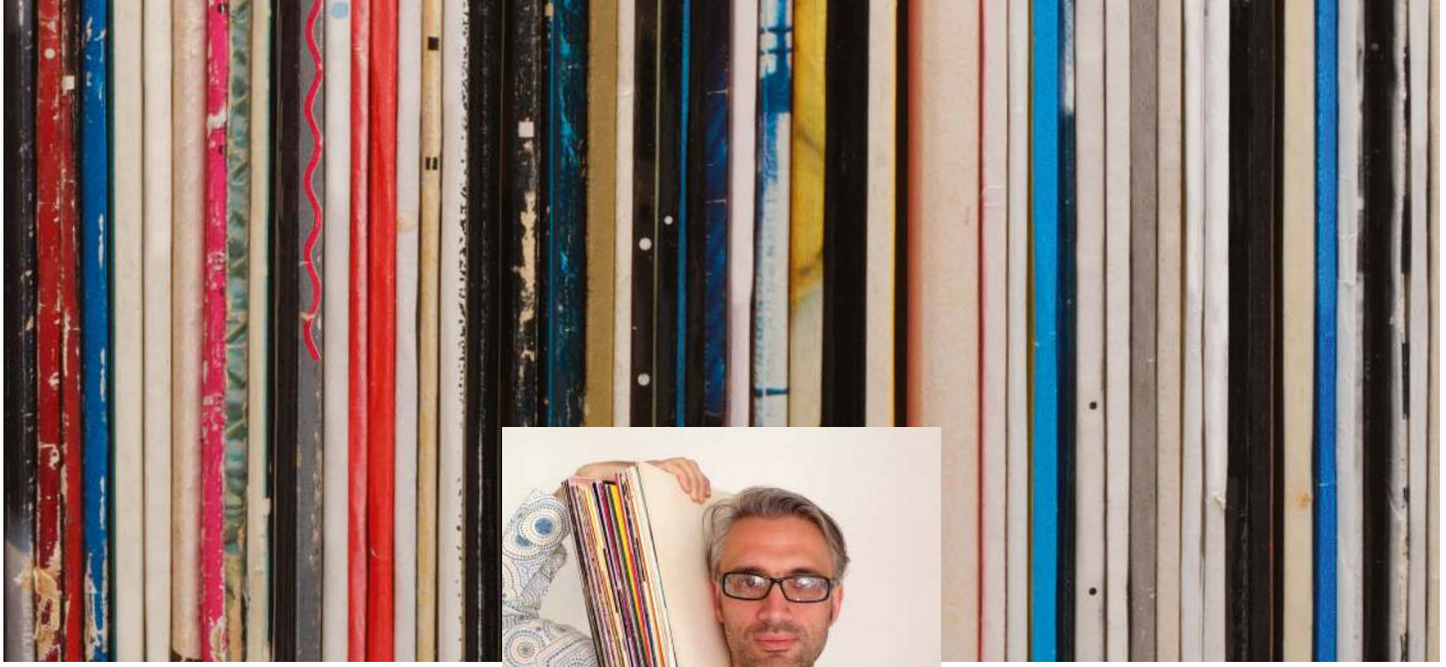
OUR PICK OF THE NEW VINYL RELEASES

10 JANUARY
Field Music, *Making A New World* (Memphis Industries); Georgia, *Seeking Thrills* (Domino); Kesha, *High Road* (RCA); Poppy, *I Disagree* (Sumerian); The Big Moon, *Walking Like We Do* (Fiction); Craven Faults, *Erratics & Unconformities* (The Leaf Label)

17 JANUARY
Algiers, *There Is No Year* (Matador); Bill Fay, *Countless Branches* (Dead Oceans); Bombay Bicycle Club, *Everything Else Has Gone Wrong* (Mmm Records); Halsey, *Manic* (Capitol); Holy Fuck, *Deleter* (Last Gang Records); Little Big Town, *Nightfall* (Capitol Nashville); Pinegrove, *Marigold* (Rough Trade); The Innocence Mission, *See You Tomorrow* (Thérèse Records); Keeley Forsyth, *Debris* (The Leaf Label); Alice Boman, *Dream On* (PIAS)

24 JANUARY
Andy Shauf, *The Neon Skyline* (ANTI-); Black Lips, *Sing In A World That's Falling Apart* (Fire Records); Wire, *Mind Hive* (Pinkflag); Wolf Parade, *Thin Mind* (Sub Pop); Okay Kaya, *Watch This Liquid Pour Itself* (Jagjaguwar)

31 JANUARY
Ben Watt, *Storm Damage* (Caroline); Dan Deacon, *Mystic Familiar* (Domino); Destroyer, *Have We Met* (Dead Oceans); Isobel Campbell, *There Is No Other* (Cooking Vinyl); Polica, *When We Stay Alive* (Memphis Industries); Torres, *Silver Tongue* (Merge); Gengahr, *Sanctuary* (Liberator Music)



IAN PEEL'S
LINER NOTES

Are you planning any vinyl-related new year's resolutions for 2020? Last year, I vowed to delve deeper into jazz. This time around, it's skiffle

For the last few years, alongside the usual promises to eat more healthily and take more exercise, I've also made a few new year's vinyl resolutions. Last year it was to delve into jazz. Inspired by a new re-pressing of the legendary *A Charlie Brown Christmas* by the Vince Guaraldi Trio, I've spent the last 12 months delving into more jazz than ever before thanks to reissues from the likes of Craft Recordings and Jazz Dispensary.

In 2020, I'll go back to the start of the last century again, too. But this time to dive into the records at the very root of rock and roll, and even punk. As Billy Bragg once told me, almost everything can be traced back to skiffle. We once had a very long chat about this subject and his observations were like a guidebook to the style and the records it inspired.

Billy's first recommendation? Lead Belly's *Rock Island Line*, because it's where it all started… "Huddie Ledbetter a/k/a Lead Belly was the greatest folk singer America has produced," he told me. "In 1934, he was assisting John Lomax who was recording prison work songs for the Library of Congress. While at Cummins Prison Farm in Arkansas, a group of inmates led by Kelly Pace sang *Rock Island Line* as a three-verse call-and-response song and, within days, Lead Belly had made it his own, adding verses flinched from blues standards and nursery rhymes. He also concocted an introduction to the song in which a railroad signalman tells a freight train to pull into a siding to let an express pass, and it became one of his most famous records."

Is skiffle really a forebearer of punk rock? You could certainly argue it, if you play records by Lonnie Donegan and The Clash back to back. "In July 1954, just a week after Elvis Presley recorded *That's Alright Mama* at Sun Studios in Memphis, Lonnie Donegan recorded a version of *Rock Island Line* for Chris Barber's seminal trad jazz album *New Orleans Joys*. His success sent a revolutionary message to every teenage boy in Britain. One, you don't need to be a musician to make music and, two, you don't need to be an American to sing American songs.

As Billy Bragg once told me, almost everything can be traced back to skiffle

"As for The Clash, both skiffle and punk rejected commerciality in favour of authenticity. Most significantly, skiffle empowered young people to make their own culture and, in doing so, sparked a revolution that led to some of the greatest British pop, R&B, rock and folk of the late 20th century…"

And for more records with the skiffle influence, I'll also spend the coming year digging into (very) early Beatles and related vinyl. George Martin produced *Don't You Rock Me, Daddy-O* by The Vipers, Billy tells me, describing it as "a clarion call to the first generation of British teenagers, for whom picking up a guitar was a sure way of defining themselves as different to their parents."

And then there was The Quarrymen, of course. "Skiffle would continue to influence their style all the way to Hamburg. One of the people who worked with The Beatles when they first came to Germany later complained that they played 'too much washboard music'!"

THE VINYLIST PABLO BALIBREA

Collector Pablo is waiting on a Nancy Sinatra reissue campaign

What was the first record you bought?
"When I was a kid, I started my collection with U2´s *Achtung Baby* and Aerosmith´s *Get A Grip* on cassette. We didn´t have a turntable back in the day, so my first album on vinyl came much later when I got *Day & Age* by The Killers in 2008."

Which genres are you interested in?
"I try not to limit the music we spin at home. Our default genres would be indie and rock, but we also enjoy listening to jazz classics and hip hop instrumentals."

How many records do you have?
"I don´t track an exact number, but have around 2,500 albums at home. We have some basics and our most recent purchases in our living room, and we also have a listening room where we store the rest of our collection."

What's the most valuable record in your collection?
"I don´t care about the money value of my records to be honest, so the most valuable records I own are the ones my wife, my daughter and my parents have bought me as a special present through the years, and the ones attached to special memories and moments."

What's the holy grail record that you'd most like to own?
"I would love the whole Nancy Sinatra discography to be reissued once and for all. I can´t believe there are so many reissues these days and I still can't get some Nancy without selling a kidney!"

What's your listening setup?
"We own two great setups. One is a Denon DP-450USB turntable plugged in to a PMA-600NE amp and our beloved Definitive Technology Demand D9 speakers. The other one is an Audio-Technica LP120 turntable plugged into a Marshall Stanmore speaker. For intimate listening sessions, we use our Meze Audio 99 Classic headphones."

MOST VALUABLE VINYL

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MADONNA
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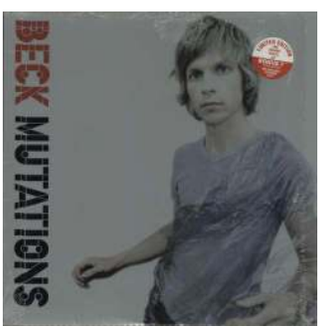
£85



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THE DOORS
L.A. WOMAN
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Now Spinning

We've been listening to our favourite tracks of 2019 while imbibing Ilkley Brewery's Mary Christmas ale, full of dried fruit flavours and festive spices

Boys In The Better Land **Fontaines DC** (Partisan)
The Barrell **Aldous Harding** (Sony)
Darkness And Cold **Purple Mountains** (Drag City)
Calm Down **Ezra Furman** (Bella Union)
Forgotten Eyes **Big Thief** (4AD)
Rolling Rocks **Michael Kiwanuka** (Polydor)
Black Skin Blue Eyed Boy **The Specials** (UMC)
I Am A Very Rude Person **Thom Yorke** (XL)
Off My Mind **Richard Hawley** (BMG)
We Were Lucky **Wilco** (dBPm)
Spinning Song **Nick Cave** (Ghosteen Ltd)
Fuck It I Love You! **Lana Del Ray** (Polydor)
Spring **Angel Olsen** (Jagjaguwar)

Rush Release

Tame Impala make an eagerly awaited return with album four in the new year

Kevin Parker's fourth album as Tame Impala is called *The Slow Rush*, and it arrives on 14 February through Fiction Records. The album was recorded between LA and Parker's studio in Fremantle, Australia, with Parker self-producing. "A lot of the songs carry this idea of time passing," says Parker, "of seeing your life flash before your eyes, being able to see clearly your life from this point onwards. I'm being swept by this notion of time passing. There's something really intoxicating about it." It's been a big year for the Australian act, having headlined Glastonbury and Coachella, as well as selling out massive shows at London's O2 and Madison Square Garden.

WE WON!

Long Live Vinyl has won the PPA Independent Publishers Commercial Partnership Award for the official Record Store Day guide, which we produce in collaboration with our friends at Record Store Day. The guide returns for its third outing in March. Watch this space.

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THE MURDER CAPITAL

After their explosive debut, the Dubliners are riding on the crest of a wave. **Dan Biggane** hangs five

The buzz surrounding The Murder Capital has escalated rapidly since the Dublin-based five-piece's daring debut, *When I Have Fears*, landed back in August. "When I look back at everything the album has brought us, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude," opines guitarist Cathal Roper when he's told that *When I Have Fears* appears in *LLV*'s best albums of 2019 list. "It's the kind of thing you dream about when you're in a band starting out," he adds of the reaction to the album.

The Murder Capital, completed by James McGovern (vocals), Damien Tuit (guitar), Gabriel Paschal Blake (bass) and Diarmuid Brennan (drums), have emerged from the shadowy underground with a sumptuous slab of melodramatic post-punk. Taking its title from a John Keats sonnet that questions mortality and regret, Roper reveals how the album "developed from discussions about death". He says: "We wanted to explore that feeling of getting everything said, that needs to be said, before you die. Having that 'concept' helped a lot."

While *When I Have Fears* may prove an emotional workout for the listener, the sound is a rich amalgam of familiarity, with echoes of The Cure, Joy Division, The Jesus And Mary Chain and Pixies. However, one could namecheck any number of acts and it would remain a moot point when applied to The Murder Capital, as Roper explains: "While we might've looked towards the likes of Nick Cave or Scott Walker, their influence might not transpire immediately, as it's all about feeling.

"You can't look for inspiration, because it will just hit you. Sometimes, late at night, you think dark thoughts and you can either get up and write it down or turn over and try to get to sleep. I always keep a journal nearby.

"We wanted to achieve a broad spectrum of mood. Creating mood helped lead us through the record's twists and turns. We watched John Carpenter's *The Thing* and loved how the score established tone. That sense of atmosphere helped inform tracks such as *Slowdance* and *Love, Love, Love*.

"Similarly, the movies of Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch helped trigger thoughts. *Green And Blue* came about after we watched a great documentary about the photographer Francesca Woodman and her work."

To help capture the glorious soundscape on tape, the band called on legendary producer Flood. Rather than be intimidated by his lengthy and impressive CV, The Murder Capital typically took everything in their stride. "He became a friend within five minutes," reveals Roper. "We were on the same wavelength and he looked to get the very best out of us. He would encourage us to re-evaluate everything we did and pushed our creativity all the time.

"There's no doubting, that when you actually consider the artists he has worked with, you do go 'wow!' But I got the feeling he understood the band better than we do ourselves. We'd love to work with him again."

It will be fascinating to see if their paths cross again and where The Murder Capital's road will lead. "We don't know what direction the next album will take yet," says Roper, "it's always changing. But the past year has been incredible. The new year will see more live dates, more writing and it's very exciting. *When I Have Fears* has opened the door and we can't wait to step through and see what's waiting."

MOLLY KEANE

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CRATE DIGGING WITH...
BOCA 45

The Bristolian DJ and beatmaker's new album *Forty Five* is out now. Here, he walks us through the records that have made a difference to him

EDAN
BEAUTY AND THE BEAT
Boston-born Edan, now residing in Brooklyn, made the perfect LP for my musical ears in 2005. It's a HEAVY hip-hop record put together like a psychedelic patchwork quilt. Edan does it all (the beats, the music, the raps, the artwork!). He's a bad ass DJ, too, check out his radio shows.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
STREET SOUNDS ELECTRO 3
Everything changed when I got this record. Yeah, it's a comp, but it's 1984, I was 10 and it was the first time I really heard hip hop, and the only way I could delve into that genre. It sounded like music from outer space and I loved it and everything it stood for.

MASSIVE ATTACK
BLUE LINES
In 1985, at the graffiti festival in Bristol, there was a crew there playing called The Wild Bunch. They were from Bristol and were like GODS. In 1991, three members of this crew made this classic and it paved the way for the rest of us Bristolians to make waves in this music game.

PJ HARVEY
THE HOPE SIX DEMOLITION PROJECT
Polly travelled to war-torn countries and wrote notes, which became the words to the LP, then set up recording sessions as art installations where people could see and hear what was going on. The result is not just a brilliant record, but a political statement.

THE AVALANCHES
WILDFLOWER
Since I Left You, The Avalanches' first LP, came out in 2000. It took another 16 years for this one to be released and it was worth the wait. It's wonky, and references post-*Pet Sounds* Beach Boys as much as it does J-Dilla, which is a musical match made in heaven. The perfect Summer LP.

QUASIMOTO
THE UNSEEN
Madlib is a massive influence. The term 'genius' isn't always deserved, but this guy is one. His discography is HUGE. This album was made when he was on mushrooms. He's experimenting all over the shop. On the record, he acts as his own nemesis (Quasimoto) by pitching up his vocal. Timeless.

THE BEATLES
THE WHITE ALBUM SUPER DELUXE
I'm a B-Boy who has earnt his B-Boy stripes, but I'm also a Beatles nut. When they reissued this last year, I approached it with some obvious suspicion, but including the Esher Demos was a genius move and totally validated how much creative juice was pumping out of them in 1968.

BEASTIE BOYS
HELLO NASTY
I read that Beastie Boys book recently, it comes highly recommended and reminds us how fantastic all of their albums up to this one are. *Hello Nasty* is like a mixtape, with so many styles and sounds morphed together perfectly. My favourites on this LP are the non hip-hop ones, like *I Don't Know*.

MARVIN GAYE
WHAT'S GOING ON
What a brave man he must have been to have made this album. He took it to his label, they hated the political message and didn't get behind it. In the UK, we lapped it up and gave it the recognition it deserved. I cross reference the production on this record, as the space between tracks is perfect.

PRIMAL SCREAM
SCREAMADELICA
The Primals spent a load of time locked away, learning how to use samplers and sequencers after going to acid house parties but still shoe-horned their love of late 60s/early 70s Stones LP by hiring producer Jimmy Miller on tracks like *Movin' On Up* and *Damaged*. This album is a masterpiece.

PETER HALL

#32 Hawkwind
IN SEARCH OF SPACE

Fans of Hawkwind, Nick Lowe, Ian Dury and Elvis Costello will be familiar with the work of Barney Bubbles, the singularly talented graphic designer behind some of the most iconic album artwork of the 70s and 80s.

Over the course of his career, Bubbles grabbed album covers by the scruff of the neck, artfully manipulating the sleeves to not only amplify and reflect the conceits of the artists involved, but also to work as a canvas for his own artistic vision.

Bubbles began his career in a high-end London ad design agency before being waylaid by the capital's hippie movement. Going alone, he quickly struck up an enduring working relationship with Hawkwind, and went on to radically overhaul the Notting Hill band's look.

His most-admired sleeve design for the group was for *In Search Of Space* (1971), the band's second studio album. The front is a die-cut interlocking foldout featuring a heavily stylised psychedelic sci-fi emblem that paid tribute to the band's lysergic brand of space-rock music. The inside panel features shots of the band.

The sleeve's reverse featured a blurred live shot of a naked Stacia, the band's performance artist dancer, flouncing in the strobe lights, alongside the words, "Technicians of spaceship Earth, this is your captain speaking, your captain is dead". Cool.

LP Inside Sleeves
LP'S
SINGLES
50% 50% 50%

SNAPSHOT

RECORD PLANET MEGA RECORD & CD FAIR

UTRECHT, NETHERLANDS

More than 30,000 record collectors swarm around no fewer than 600 stalls from countries all over the world at the 52nd Record Planet Mega Record & CD Fair in Utrecht. The event is the largest of its kind on the planet, with dealers travelling from as far afield as Turkey, Brazil and Japan – as well as a good few familiar faces from the UK. Alongside the frenzied cratedigging scenes, other attractions included a rare vinyl sale by Omega Auctions, live music, DJs and book signings. The next instalment takes place at the vast Jaarbeurs convention centre from April 18-19 2020. ●

WHY I LOVE

ARCTIC MONKEYS
TRANQUILITY BASE HOTEL & CASINO

HAZEL WILDE
LANTERNS ON THE LAKE

Repeated listening paid off for the Lanterns' chief songwriter as she found herself immersed in the Arctic Monkeys' sixth studio album. With comparisons to *Kid A* and *Pet Sounds* on the table, **Gary Walker** takes note

Records that create a universe for you to step into and soak up always appeal to me. *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* does this on a grand scale. As you dive into its sepia-toned imagery, you are transported to a cocktail bar in some far-off moon colony; Alex Turner as the resident lounge singer at this fictional lunar base. I'll be honest, on first listen I thought this record felt sonically one-dimensional and the lyrics seemed fragmented and absurd. But the more I listened the more I loved it. What at first seem like amusing but abstract lyrics become invitations to drop in on part of Turner's conversations, it being your job to put the narrative together.

"Baby, that isn't how they look tonight, it took the light forever just to get to your eyes," he sings and we guess he must be looking up at the stars with his lover. It's once you are fully immersed in this record that you really appreciate how the sonic landscape, with its laid-back, understated intricacies, allows space for Turner to bring this universe to life. The sound of the record itself is as rich as the imagery.

Considering Arctic Monkeys' back catalogue, this record seemingly came from nowhere. I'm sure even the other band members were baffled and, probably, concerned for Turner when they arrived at his Los Angeles home, donning their *AM*-era leather jackets and slicked-back quiffs, ready to hear their bandmate's latest collection of three-minute indie hits. Only to be greeted at the door by Turner in white flares, open-chest wide-collar shirt, clutching a cocktail. "Come in lads,"

Hazel Wilde (centre) is captivated by Alex Turner's songwriting craft on the Arctic Monkeys' most recent studio album

he must've crooned, passing his guitar and sitting down at his piano to showcase his masterpiece.

I'm sure there were some bemused expressions in the room when he launched into *One Point Perspective,* opening with the line "dancing in my underpants, I'm gonna run for government". Not a hook or chugging guitar chorus in sight. It is ironic, given how far removed this record is from that white indie boy world, that Turner's opening line on the record is, "I just wanted to be one of The Strokes".

THE ULTRACHEESE

Somehow, the world that this record creates is escapist science-fiction, whilst also pulling in observations from our current reality – see *Star Treatment,* "everybody's on a barge floating down an endless stream of great TV" as a case in point. Turner makes reference to fake news, "they take the truth and make it fluid" in *American Sports* and gives a knowing wink and satirical dig at the hypocritical capitalism of our modern world in *Batphone*: "I launch my fragrance called Integrity, I sell the fact that I can't be bought."

There are also intimate moments which register with me as a songwriter – most beautifully done when Turner sings of his craft: "What a death I died writing that song, start to finish with you looking on, it stays between us, Steinway and his sons, 'cause it's the ultracheese".

In a time when many artists' focus is on crafting songs that get listeners past the 30-second mark on Spotify to be eligible as a paid stream, Arctic Monkeys did a rare thing; they created a piece of art which exists as a whole rather than a collection of 'tracks'.

"The world this record creates is escapist science-fiction, whilst pulling in observations from current reality"

Much like *Kid A* was for Radiohead or *Pet Sounds* for The Beach Boys, I can see why *Tranquility Base* was greeted with bemusement by some hardcore fans of the band – on first listen it can be a challenge. But ultimately, as with those seminal records, I genuinely believe that this album will stand the test of time and be revered as a defining creative point in the evolution of the band. ●

Lanterns On The Lake's fourth studio album, *Spook The Herd,* is set for release on 21 February via Bella Union. It will be accompanied by a full UK tour

10 Questions For... AMYL & THE SNIFFERS

Snotty punks with attitude, mullets and talent to spare, Amyl & The Sniffers have had quite a year. Singer Amy Taylor tells **Jonathan Wright** about the roots of the band in sunny Australia, and recording their debut LP in not so sunny Sheffield

Can you tell us about Amyl's early days in Melbourne?
"We were all housemates and I'd played in some other bands, but we joked about starting a band together just so we could play house parties. One time, we got home from our days doing whatever we were doing, and all the shit was set up in my room, and we just jammed a little bit, wrote some stuff, recorded it that night, made up the band name and put it out the next day. We kind of did that so we could get some gigs booked. The first EP, *Giddy Up* [2016], was a demo really."

What's the dynamic of the characters in the band?
"The boys like going to the pub and drinking, and staying up real late and all that stuff. You know the TV show *The Young Ones*? Bryce [Wilson, drums] is Neil, Gus [Romer, bass] would be Viv. I'm either Mike or I'm Rick. Declan [Martens, guitar] is either Mike or Rick as well. I like being a business bitch. They're pretty good, they usually show up on time and I don't really care if they get fucked up because all they have to do is hit their instruments!"

What's it like in Mullumbimby, New South Wales, where you grew up?
"It's pretty nice, a mix of hippies and farmers. It's really pretty, I loved to go to the beach. I went three times a day 'cos that was what I fucking loved, but I was like a bull in a china store when I left [aged 18]. I lived out of town and the only stuff I did was go to all-ages gigs. And a lot of the stuff was punk and hardcore, and a lot of garage bands as well. I'd go to a punk show and people were shoving everybody and there was swearing, and I just really liked that, the potential violence of it all. People were angry and they were just getting rid of it, yelling. And there was real community, too. They were tiny venues and I loved it so much."

Playing to the mosh pit is something you do today...
"I love the mosh pit. When the crowd gets rowdy, in my head that means it's a good show. Which isn't necessarily true, but just because when I go to a show and it's sweaty and rowdy, that's my favourite. But I also don't mind if it's chilled as well because I don't want the people to get beaten up every night!"

What did your parents do?
"My dad was a crane driver, a 'tradie', a construction worker. Or the lollipop man, the stop-go bloke, all that kind of stuff. And mum, she worked in a takeaway shop, she worked at a pre-school, the post office. She's a real smart mum though. She's been studying for the past eight years, and she's been working two-three jobs and studying – and getting high distinctions, she's been studying counselling. She's cool. Growing up, I felt pretty powerless because nobody educates you on how to fucking figure out everything. All you could really think about was mum and dad were working just to get by. We were always really lucky, and had food every night and a house."

You recorded the LP with Ross Orton in Sheffield, what was that like?
"It was cool because they're all rough round the edges, kind of feral, and that's what we're like, so it worked. The studio, the toilet was outside, it was freezing cold. I swear the sun was only up an hour a day, if you can even call it the sun. It was such a weird experience. And they ate pork pies and shit. It was so foreign, it was like a TV show really."

What do you think of the songs now? Are there themes you see?
"There's all different things. A huge chunk of those songs were written at the end of 2017, so it's kind of funny with those now because even though I wrote them at a certain time, I relate them to current things. They're always changing. You write something and then a year later you realise what you were writing about. That's cool. The more I travel, the more educated I am. I'm not the most educated person, but I'm always learning stuff, so it's cool to be able to write stuff as I'm learning."

You played Glastonbury, how was that for you?
"The set was sick, but the festival is too much for my brain. I swear there were more people at Glastonbury than in the whole of Australia. The set was real fun though. And it was so hot. I know I'm from Australia, but it was so fucking hot. I'd love to go another year when we can just hang out and have a proper look around."

Do you buy vinyl?
"I love buying vinyl. If we play with a band we love, I think it's the coolest thing ever to have their vinyl. But I don't really have a home base at the moment, so it's hard to have vinyl."

What would you like the trajectory of the band to be?
"I personally don't have any goals. I just want to see what happens with it. I was happy working in a supermarket and I'll be happy doing this. We'll see what happens." ●

ELLEN VIRGONA

I just love the aesthetic and sound of vinyl. The digital age is a fucker and has neutered expression

Robert Plant is an ever-evolving creative who escaped the legacy of expectation to inspire generations. As he celebrates his *Digging Deep* podcast with a new limited edition 7" singles boxset of solo material, Dan Biggane looks back with the former Led Zeppelin frontman

MADS PERCH

Legend is a label dished liberally when describing any musician or artist of a certain vintage. However, when attributed to someone like Robert Plant, even that expression seems a little conservative. It is telling that when people consider the former Led Zeppelin frontman, who turned 71 this August, they tend to focus on what he's doing now or next; there's barely a moment to revel in past glories.

This here is a gentleman who has never once taken his foot off the gas or shifted down the gears to find reverse. During an incredible five-decade-long recording career, every new release has been greeted with genuine interest, and he has very rarely, if ever, fallen short of the mark. Plant is an artist who has remained resolutely relevant and whose work is consistently contemporary.

Even with *Digging Deep*, his career retrospective podcast launched earlier this year, you're captivated by what he has to say. He talks about music with an enthusiasm and excitement that is both engaging and entertaining. Indeed, any listener to *Digging Deep* will concur, he has an encyclopedic knowledge and a charming disposition. And when *Long Live Vinyl* catches up with Plant, he talks with consideration and good humour.

"I've written and performed a lot of tracks in my time," he opens warmly, "and I realised that some of them have just got left behind. For the podcast, I decided to go back and pick out some songs that might've got lost along the way. Since 1981, I've enjoyed many amazing, exciting musicians. Men and women who have encouraged and enlightened, introducing me to crazy curves I could never have imagined."

WHEN I WAS A CHILD

The world of podcasts, streaming, downloads and instant musical gratification is so far removed from that experienced by a young Plant living in a semi-rural Halesowen in the West Midlands.

"In 1959, when I was 11 years old, radio wasn't doing us youngsters any favours," recalls an earnest Plant. "I didn't have a record player as a young kid, so music was something of a closed shop. Beyond showcasing big bands and the odd Perry Como number, radio offered us very little, but occasionally you'd find a rock 'n' roll song – usually a request for members of the serving armed forces.

"My father was really into military bands and brass bands, while my mother liked light pop. However, there were some older kids in my street who had record players and a collection of 45s, they introduced me to a wide spread of black music and rock 'n' roll. This music offered me an escape from the grind of education and in my early teenage years the songs of Dion And The Belmonts or The Cleftones spoke about heartache and the fantasy of young love. The music celebrated the wonder of being a teenager and it was a universal feeling.

Page and Plant on stage post-Zep

"British bands started latching on to the American grooves, but there was a radical difference between Little Richard and Cliff Richard. Stourbridge Town Hall would attract musicians passing through, and going to a concert there was like stepping into wonderland. I remember seeing Gene Vincent and experiencing a feeling of menace. He represented teen rebellion and it was something I could lock into.

"I also saw The Walker Brothers and remember how you couldn't hear a word over the hysterical screaming girls, which was a great shame because Scott was a fantastic singer and a real mood merchant. However, the frenzy of it all really had quite an effect on me. It pushed a button and captured my soul. It was around then I started to believe you could do it yourself.

> **There was always a radical difference between Little Richard and Cliff Richard...**

"I was in my mid-teens when I started hanging out with a group called Andy Long And The Original Jurymen, a sort of beat group who played a diluted version of American standards. Andy got sick one time, so I stood in. Boy we murdered the life out of Chuck Berry, but I imagine it sounded pretty good in a small room in front of a handful of people. I started singing while living at home working on my GCEs. To think, four years before those clubs, I was only interested in filling my stamp collection!"

DANCING DAYS

While fiercely proud of his Black Country roots, it's hard to imagine that the frontman of a world-conquering group would hail from such a humble musical background. But there was more to the small West Midlands market town of Stourbridge than met the eye.

"There was a folk house in Stourbridge that became something of a mecca," Robert explains fondly. "We're not talking Greenwich Village here, but with the music being played came an array of interesting characters. Stourbridge College of Art attracted students from Western Europe, and with them came this exotic, bohemian element. I'd go to record parties and they would have a seriousness about them. I was exposed to all kinds of different music and literature. It was a remarkable and sensory experience.

BERND MUELLER/REDFERNS/GETTY

"I'd already been fully seduced by the blues and developed a taste for Robert Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, Bo Diddley, Otis Rush, Sonny Boy Williamson… So, while I always leaned towards the roots-oriented blues when singing, I also emulated the sweet expressive delivery of Gene Vincent. It was from there I developed a style that drew from both worlds and found my own voice."

Gigging the clubs, Plant honoured his love for the blues with a variety of bands such as The New Memphis Bluesbreakers, Black Snake Moan, The Delta Blues Band, The Tennessee Teens and The Crawling King Snakes. It was with the King Snakes that Plant met and became firm friends with a drummer called John Bonham.

The pair went on to play in The Band Of Joy, an experimental outfit who merged the blues with the developing West Coast psychedelic rock scene. After they failed to attract any interest from labels in London, the group disbanded and Robert headed back to Birmingham. He didn't have to wait too long before fate, in the guise of the musician Terry Reid, prompted rock superstardom to come knocking at his door.

Following the demise of his 60s beat combo The Yardbirds, burgeoning guitar god Jimmy Page had approached Reid to fill the vocalist spot for his proposed new group. Having committed to open US tours for Cream and The Rolling Stones, Reid suggested the "wild and mad" singer of an act who he had seen as an opener at one of his shows. That support group was Band Of Joy, the singer was Robert Plant, the rest is rock 'n' roll history.

GOOD TIMES BAD TIMES

50 years ago, Led Zeppelin, completed by bassist John Paul Jones and Plant's old mucker John Bonham on drums, released both *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II* and set about redefining rock 'n' roll. Over the course of a 10-year period the band became one of the most successful, innovative and influential groups in music history.

Zeppelin not only broke all records; they broke every rule. Signed to Atlantic Records, the group enjoyed considerable artistic freedom and pushed boundaries to the limit. Across eight albums, Zeppelin mashed rock 'n' roll, blues and folk with Celtic, Indian and Arabic traditions to concoct a heady brew that sounded both familiar but also otherworldly and totally new.

This mystical musical melting pot proved a cosmic trip for fans around the globe, with reported worldwide album sales now exceeding 300 million. Indeed, in May this year, the Recording Industry Association of America reported that they are the fifth highest-selling music act in the US (behind The Beatles, Garth Brooks, Elvis and Eagles) with 111.5 million units sold. At home in the UK they have had five multi-platinum, six platinum, one gold, four silver albums and notched up a remarkable eight consecutive No.1 LPs.

Sadly, the rock 'n' roll rollercoaster derailed on the morning of 25 September 1980 when, after a day of drinking and rehearsing, John Bonham was found dead at Page's house in Windsor. According to the coroner's report, the drummer had the equivalent of 40 vodka shots in his system.

Rather than replace Bonham, Led Zeppelin chose to disband out of respect. In a press release, issued by Swan Song Records and signed 'Led Zeppelin', the band announced that they could not continue as they were.

"Through chronic terrible luck I'd lost my buddy," reflects Plant. "After we lost Bonzo, I needed to stretch out and try new things."

CALLING TO YOU-OU-OU

Throughout the 80s and into the early 90s, Plant enjoyed success with a string of solo albums. He says: "In 1981 I had a strong starting position as a singer with a reputation. After Led Zep there was no formula and I jumped around. There's a virility in the essence of creativity. Repetition is dull as dishwater. I went on to develop multiple identities over a number of records and I have had the freedom to do some incredibly varied things."

Plant's return was marked by 1982's *Pictures At Eleven* and *The Principle Of Moments* in 1983. Both albums garnered favourable reviews and landed the singer in the UK album charts at No.2 and No.7 respectively. Popular tracks from this period included *Big Log* (a Top 20 hit in 1983) and *In The Mood* (1983), while *Little By Little*, from 1985's *Shaken 'n' Stirred* topped the US Mainstream Rock Chart for two weeks.

"At the time of recording most of these songs I was locked into the romance of what was contemporary," reveals Plant. "So, they sound kinda brittle now. It was the electronic age and nobody wanted guitars, but from that same period came a lot of good stuff: Cocteau Twins, The Jesus And Mary Chain and all that great music on 4AD."

Plant's new limited-edition boxset of 7" singles includes 16 hits and rare B-sides from the albums released between 1982 and 2005. "*Digging Deep* collects two songs from each album," says Plant. "There's no formula to them and they all sound different. They are remastered versions and I'm delighted to see them released as 45s. I just love the aesthetic and sound of vinyl. The digital age is a fucker and has neutered expression in recording. There's a radical difference and, sadly, it's difficult to get back from digital."

Following the release of *Shaken 'n' Stirred*, guitar-based music enjoyed something of a resurgence. The heavy influence of Led

Led Ringers

"When my son was young, it disturbed me when he heard Axl Rose on the radio and thought it was me," laughs Robert Plant. Here are five more vocalists who echo his singing style

JACK WHITE
THE WHITE STRIPES

There's a mutual respect between Plant and White. Plant has said: "I love Jack White's buccaneer spirit, and the way he dodges through the musical horizons", while White described Led Zeppelin as "an immovable force in music."

STEVEN TYLER
AEROSMITH

At the height of their heady 70s stardom, Aerosmith were touted as 'the American Rolling Stones', but perhaps a Page/Pant comparison better suited Messrs Joe Perry and Steven Tyler.

ANN & NANCY WILSON
HEART

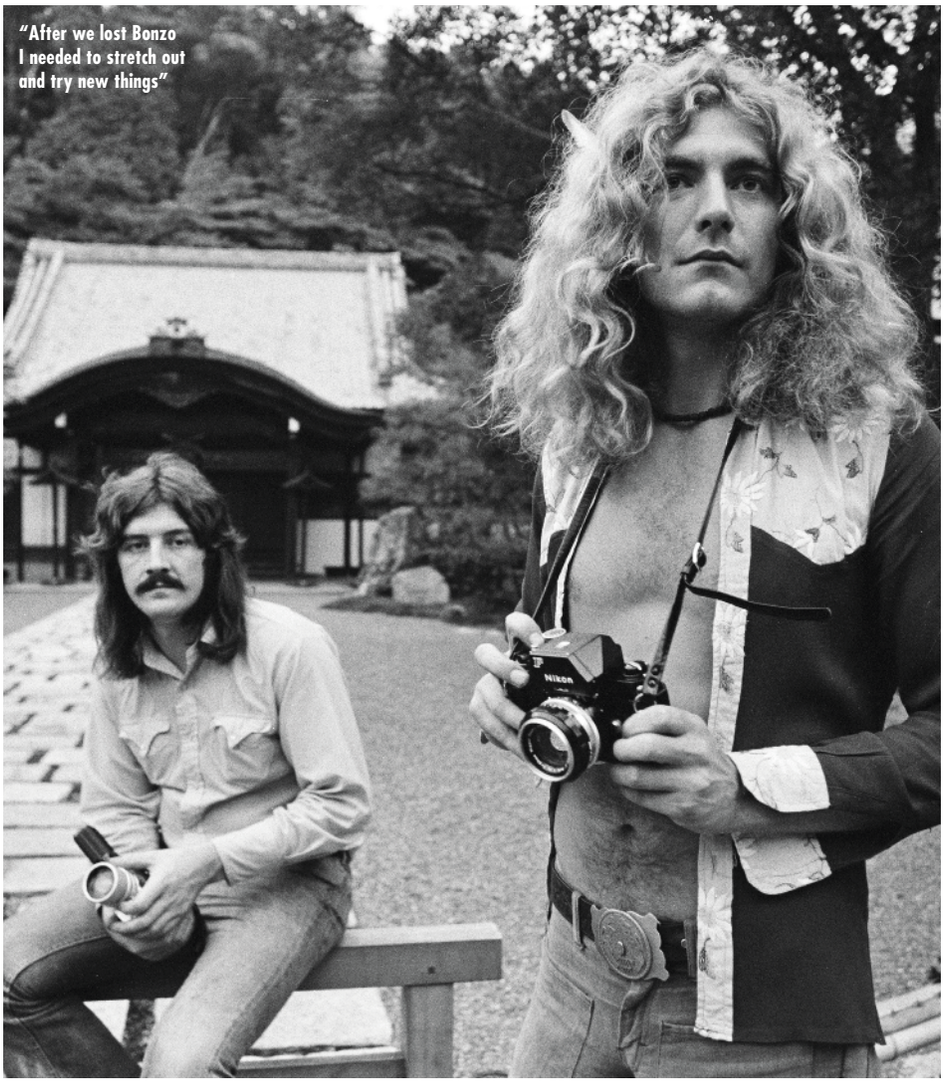
Who could possibly forget Heart's performance of *Stairway To Heaven* at the Kennedy Center 2012 Honors. Their momentous rendition, with full gospel choir and Jason Bonham on drums, had an emotional Plant on the verge of tears.

CHRIS CORNELL
SOUNDGARDEN/AUDIOSLAVE

The Soundgarden frontman was a Robert Plant for the 90s alt-rock uprising. While musically the Seattle legends may have had more of an affinity with the doom-laden riffage of Black Sabbath, it was clear Cornell could deliver a Plant-esque banshee wail.

JOSH KISZKA
GRETA VAN FLEET

When Greta Van Fleet released their debut *Anthem Of The Peaceful Army,* the rock press sat up excitedly. The Led Zep singer joked: "He borrowed his voice from somebody I know very well."



Zeppelin had filtered through the generations and was reflected greatly in both the wam-bam-thank-you-glam of LA's hair metal scene and the rising Seattle sound that was labelled grunge. *Now And Zen* (1988), *Manic Nirvana* (1990) and the hugely successful *Fate Of Nations* (1993) all seem to reflect this reignited interest and possess a sound more akin to that which had previously defined Plant in Led Zeppelin. It was time for Page to come knocking again.

"At the end of the Fate Of Nations run, Jimmy came to visit me in Boston and the idea of working with him on *Unledded* was very exciting. It proved to be a very emotive project. We returned to Marrakech, where we had written *Kashmir* some 20 years earlier, and we got to work with some incredible musicians, like Hassan El Arfaoui.

"We went on to do *Walking Into Clarksdale* and what we did was very good. We enjoyed success with *Most High*, but I don't think it had legs. Yes, it was 'Page and Plant', but it was a real stretch without the other members of Led Zep and we couldn't get from underneath the weight of that legend."

The new millennium has proved a fruitful time for Plant. After years of reunion rumours, Led Zeppelin, with John Bonham's son Jason filling in on drums, performed a full two-hour set on 10 December 2007 at the Ahmet Ertegün Tribute Concert. Plant has since concentrated on numerous projects including Priory of Brion, the Strange Sensation, Alison Krauss, The Band Of Joy and, since 2012, the Sensational Space Shifters.

He has also continually bothered the UK Album Chart Top 10 with a number of critically acclaimed albums including *Band Of Joy* (2010), *Lullaby And The Ceaseless Roar* (2014) and the marvellous *Carry Fire* (2017).

"Thankfully, people now see me very differently and I can work with the likes of Willie Nelson, Alison Krauss, Steve Earle and Nathaniel Rateliff. I enjoy playing with my peers. The pressure of the grandiose belongs to a different era and what I do now can be so much more intimate. I can visit old songs, but I deal with the present and the future, not so much the past. There's a lot of self-satisfaction in what I'm doing and I'm more than content with that."

Ramble On

FIVE POST-LED ZEP PROJECTS THAT ROCKED OUR WORLD

THE HONEYDRIPPERS: VOLUME ONE

THE HONEYDRIPPERS

Formed by Plant in 1981, the band also boasted Page, Jeff Beck and numerous muso friends including Paul Shaffer and Nile Rodgers. **DISCOGS** £3.29

THEM CROOKED VULTURES

THEM CROOKED VULTURES

When John Paul Jones joined forces with Josh Homme and Dave Grohl, he found himself in a formidable hard-rocking supergroup. **DISCOGS** £19.72

COVERDALE-PAGE

DAVID COVERDALE & JIMMY PAGE

Page hooked up with Whitesnake pal Coverdale for *Coverdale-Page*. It sounds dated now, but rocked in at No.4 on the album chart at the time. **DISCOGS** £72.17

RAISING SAND

ALISON KRAUSS & ROBERT PLANT

Released in 2007 and produced by T-Bone Burnett, *Raising Sand* features recordings of lesser-known tracks from R&B, blues, folk and country songwriters. **DISCOGS** £16.57

LIVE AT THE GREEK

JIMMY PAGE & THE BLACK CROWES

In 1999, following a jam with Page at a Crowes show in London, the guitarist teamed up with the Georgia rockers for a two-night performance of material from the Led Zeppelin catalogue and old blues standards. **DISCOGS** £28.06

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Happy Songs

When Beck Hansen wanted to make upbeat music on his 12th studio album, he turned to pop megastar Pharrell Williams as a collaborator. **Rob Haywood** meets the Californian polymath and self-confessed "vinyl nerd" to talk *Hyperspace*, Miles Davis, Chris Martin and crappy old Toyotas

On a rainy evening in late September, a small London venue is playing host to a 'private booking'. The website for that event is suitably vague, but from 6pm a small gathering of journalists and industry insiders shake the water from their coats, grab complimentary drinks and wonder at the enormous soundsystem that dominates the room.

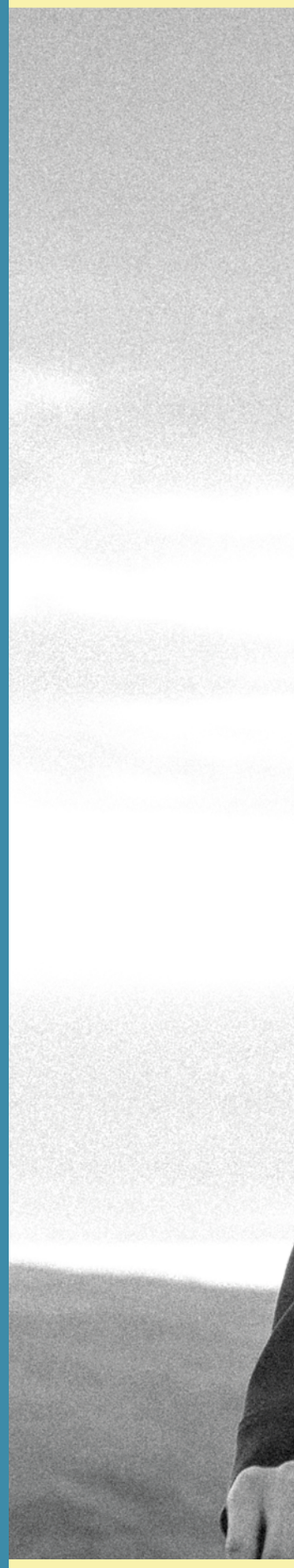
"These speakers probably cost more than your house," opines the compère. "This amplifier definitely does." It's clear that despite the size of the venue, tonight will be loud. Shortly afterwards, Beck strolls in with a small, umbrella-wielding entourage. Subtly stylish in a white shirt with black pin-stripes and a black jacket with white pin-stripes, he is here to partake in a short Q&A session before a playback of his forthcoming LP *Hyperspace*, still two months ahead of its release.

"I told my manager I wanted to make some happy songs," recalls Beck of his first serious meeting with *Hyperspace* collaborator Pharrell Williams. "90 seconds later, I walked in to meet him and he says, 'Just wait a minute while I finish writing this song'. It was *Happy*."

Hyperspace, Beck Hansen's 12th album (not counting a couple of compilations of early material), has been years in the making. Not because he suffered from any kind of writer's block, but because he spiralled off through a host of other projects that continue to challenge and confound in equal measure.

Beck initially caught international notice when *Loser* broke through a mind-blowing quarter of a century ago, and physically he seems to have changed little since. Musically, his journey has been an eclectic one, swirling through folk-post-punk-pop-rock-country-blues-rap-Mariachi and multiple combinations of all of the above.

The past decade opened with the low-key *Modern Guilt*, swept back with the lush sounds of *Morning Phase* and rebooted with the pop majesty of *Colors*. In the midst of these extremes, Beck worked with Bat For Lashes, Robyn and Cage The Elephant, and put out a small series of standalone 12" singles and *Song Reader*, an album of sheet music.



Despite his expression, Beck was keen to record an album of happy songs

Beck and Pharrell have been talking about working together forever, and finally got together

The elongated mixes on the 12" singles were inspired by Miles Davis. "At the time, I would do a song at the proper three and a half minutes of a pop song," says Beck. "I liked the idea of doing a version where you take all the ideas that you track into a particular song and elongate it and let it just develop in a way that a three-minute song would never allow. So I was going to do a whole series of songs like this.

"When I'm recording a song there might be five or 10 sections that don't make it into the final song. There may be more hooks and guitar parts that are left behind because there's not enough time to fit it all in. So there was something interesting about having a micro and macro version."

As if that wasn't enough, he also gathered together groups of like-minded musicians and singers to cover a whole album in a day and posted the video results on his website under the banner of Beck's Record Club. The Velvet Underground, Leonard Cohen, Skip Spence, INXS and Yanni all received the Record Club treatment.

The past two years have been filled with *Colors*, a Top 5-selling album on both sides of the Atlantic and double Grammy winner. A lengthy tour followed, which delayed work on any new songs, but now Beck is back.

Two days before the *Hyperspace* playback session, Beck is telling *Long Live Vinyl* about his songwriting process and his evolution over the past three decades. He has come a long way from singing into a beat-up ghetto blaster and then overdubbing using a second tape deck in the late 1980s.

"I really look to filmmakers and auteurs," he explains. "Their processes are very inspiring to me and so I'm always working on the next film before the other one has really seen the light of day. I'm already on to the next thing." This constant writing meant he was already thinking about what would become *Hyperspace* before he had even recorded *Colors* in 2015. He also chose to bring in a writing partner for the new songs.

"It's an interesting collaboration," he explains. "It's one that I've been contemplating for 20 years now, so it's been a long gestation of hovering around each other and meeting in random places, like a hotel elevator and sort of just getting up the courage to call him up. Eventually, we had a meeting and talked about working and we went in the studio and messed around here and there, and then we got serious last year. He rang me up at the start of the year to write some lyrics for an N*E*R*D song [*1,000*] and then he invited me out to the studio where he was working and he had some ideas and I had some ideas and we were on our way."

Neither Beck nor Williams was sure what would come of these ad hoc sessions: a one-off single was considered, but it soon became

Beck On Black

Five vinyl collectibles from his catalogue

"I think vinyl is a great format," says Beck. "I have a turntable in my living room and now my daughter is very taken with vinyl, she buys records. The last thing we did, before I left to promote the new album, was shopping for vinyl. I don't get the chance to do too much on tour, just because there isn't time. We have some good vinyl shops in LA and a lot of my friends have a good vinyl setup, my brother got one last year and got all of his old records out, it's a sort of renaissance at his house."

BECK/BEAN
MTV MAKES ME WANT TO SMOKE CRACK
FLIPSIDE RECORDS
Debut vinyl release, a split 7" single from 1993, comes with *Privates On Parade* by Bean.
DISCOGS £55

BECK
A WESTERN HARVEST FIELD BY MOONLIGHT
FINGERPAINT RECORDS
10" EP from 1994, original 3,000 copies came complete with finger-painting art done by the man himself.
DISCOGS £34

BECK
I JUST STARTED HATING SOME PEOPLE TODAY
THIRD MAN
7" single recorded for Jack White's Third Man Records in 2012.
DISCOGS £3

BECK
GIMME
FONOGRAF
Double 12" single featuring five mixes of the title track, the longest coming in at just over the 14-minute mark.
DISCOGS £58

BECK
COLORS
FONOGRAF/CAPITOL
Deluxe boxed edition with double LPs on red vinyl and lyric book.
DISCOGS £17

apparent that they worked well together and the songs began to flow. "We started to realise how many songs we had and we felt like maybe we had an album," says Beck. "So when I finished the *Colors* tour last October I came in and just tried to wrap up as much of it as I could. I played it for my label and they were really excited."

The excitement was well placed. Whereas Beck has broadly changed from one style to the next from album to album or project to project, this new collection of songs spans multiple moods, styles and atmospheres, but is presented as a very coherent whole. As a single piece, it's possibly Beck's strongest album in many years.

The album wrestles with some grandiose themes, but Beck brings it right down to a personal level, starting with the title and the cover art. One aspect of the album is escapism from the pressures of day-to-day life, but "It can be an internal escapism," he explains. "It doesn't have to be a grand gesture or statement." He chose a "crappy old Toyota" for the cover to show that any vehicle can be your own "spaceship" to navigate your way through life. "We all get to the same place where everything you've ever had or lost won't matter," he says. The album title, spelled out in Japanese on the cover, hints at a larger sense of escapism. "When I was a kid, I played a video game [*Galaxian*] which had a button that when you pressed it you vanished and appeared somewhere else. I looked it up and it was called the 'hyperspace' button." This escape from the world today is echoed in the song titles: *Dark Places*, *Stratosphere*, *Everlasting Nothing* and the title track.

The album opens with the simple ethereal voice and keyboards of *Hyperlife* and leads directly into *Uneventful Days*, the first song to be completed for the record and a clear indication of Pharrell Williams' input. The accompanying video harks back to previous Beck performances, with Tessa Thompson playing *Devil's Haircut*-era Beck and Evan Rachel Wood cast as the singer in his *Sexx Laws* period.

Some songs on the record started from distinct ideas Beck had and others that Williams brought to the studio. Others, such as *Saw Lightning*, came form the two jamming together. "We made a big mess and I edited it together and threw different lyrics on there," says Beck. "Then I brought it to him and he changed the beat and some other parts, and so it was a back and forth collaboration." Pharrell added a scratch vocal as a placeholder for the rap part, meant to be a guide until they could get a rapper to come in and fill the space. They

"I think vinyl is a great format. I have a turntable in my living room and my daughter is very taken with it"

As well as Pharrell, collaborators on the new album include Chris Martin and Sky Ferreira

"Yes, that's the start of Side A and Side B. Vinyl nerd, I am guilty! I do think about the sequence and how they live together"

just never got around to it and so Williams is credited with adding "mumbles" to the record.

Much of the album was recorded at Beck's house in Los Angeles. Seven of the songs are collaborations with Williams, Beck himself produces *Stratosphere* and he also worked with Cole MGN, Greg Kurstin and Paul Epworth at various stages of the sessions. The Paul Epworth session took place in London. "We worked together a while back and tried to come up with some songs for *Colors*," recalls Beck. "But we went in more of a funk groove and it didn't really fit with that album, it was more gritty and the *Colors* album was more polished and sophisticated. I felt it really fit with these new songs."

Track seven on the album is *Hyperspace*, a more immediate companion to the opening *Hyperlife* and the reason for its position in the running order soon becomes apparent. "Yes, that's the start of Side A and Side B," he explains. "Vinyl nerd. I am guilty!" How the songs on this album were placed to set the tone meant Beck's growing catalogue of unreleased music continued to grow. "I do think about the sequence and how they live together," he muses. "There were some really important songs that I ended up taking off the record. In that overriding arc of the record, that sequence, that momentum, the spell that the songs coupled together cast, I think it was diminished by some of the songs. They felt like disruptions."

11 songs made the final cut and while Pharrell Williams is the strongest presence, there are numerous guest artists all over the album. A stand-out song is *Die Waiting*, which features Sky Ferreira, a synth-pop singer who has also appeared in *Twin Peaks*. "I had the song all year," recalls Beck. "I was listening one day and sometimes I hear something that's missing and I was hearing a female voice, trying to figure out who would be right for the song. Sky was someone I knew for a number of years and she lived right down the street. It was interesting because we had a hard time getting it so that you could hear her separate from me, as our voices blended so well. We had to keep turning her up louder than me. She's in there loud, she just had a way of being part of the song."

One of the biggest names to add a voice was Coldplay's Chris Martin. Beck and the Coldplay singer had already teamed up at a benefit show with Chad Smith (Red Hot Chili Peppers), Roy Bittan (The E-Street Band) and Jakob Dylan back in 2016. "One day I was working and I could just hear Chris at the end of this, his voice on the harmonies. He really added a lot, but again it's in that blend. A kind of Crosby, Stills and Nash thing where all the voices are one. Less of a duet and more of an ensemble vocal. But his voice has such a presence and tone that fits the song, atmospheric and emotional."

The blend of voices that peppers the record literally reaches its crescendo with the album-closing *Everlasting Nothing*, an epic ending to a cinematic opus of a record. "There's a gospel choir that I've been working with for years and it's run by a man called Fred Martin, who takes kids from Compton in LA and he mentors them. A lot of these singers have not really recorded but done live performances.

"This was actually the first song we recorded together and we did it years ago, the first time Pharrell and I actually got into a studio and hung out together. But the song is even older and I remember performing it live with the choir before I even had them come in and sing on it." The effect is an incredibly uplifting end to the record, as Beck laments those he has lost along the way.

Going back to the first song to be aired from the album, *Saw Lightning* is probably the most-Beck song on the record, if indeed such a thing exists. A stripped-down freestyle version of the song has been available on YouTube for a while, with the singer in full blues-effect with harmonica in hand and stomping boots on. "That's just something that is in my vocabulary, that I forget about," he says. "It's something you do that you take for granted. So for me, it's a natural thing and someone like Pharrell will bring it out." He certainly has.

MARK HORTON/GETTY

PIAS ACTION PRESTON • BADLANDS CHELTENHAM • BANQUET KINGSTON • BEATDOWN NEWCASTLE • BLACK CIRCLE LEIGHTON BUZZARD • BEAR TREE SHEFFIELD • CASBAH GREENWICH • COOL DISC DERRY • CRASH LEEDS • CULT HERO BRIGHTON • DAVID'S LETCHWORTH • DIVERSE NEWPORT • DRIFT TOTNES • EARWORM YORK • ECLIPSE WALSALL • ELEPHANT WINCHESTER • ELSEWHERE MARGATE • EMPIRE ST ALBANS • FIVES LEIGH ON SEA • FOREVER NOTTINGHAM • FREEBIRD DUBLIN • FRIENDLY BRISTOL • GATEFIELD SOUNDS WHITSTABLE • GATEFOLD HITCHIN • HONEST JONS LONDON • JAM FALMOUTH • JUMBO LEEDS • LEFT FOR DEAD SHREWSBURY • LET IT ROLL CAMDEN • LEVEL CROSSING MORTLAKE • LOST IN VINYL CAMBRIDGE • MOLD RECORD SHOP MOLD • MONORAIL GLASGOW • MUSIC NOT DEAD BEXHILL • NORMANS LEEDS • PEBBLE EASTBOURNE • PHONICA LONDON • PICCADILLY MANCHESTER • PIE & VINYL SOUTHSEA • POLAR BEAR BIRMINGHAM • PROBE LIVERPOOL • RAPTURE WITNEY • RAVES FROM THE GRAVE FROME • RECORD CORNER GODALMING • REFLEX NEWCASTLE • RELEVANT CAMBRIDGE • RESIDENT BRIGHTON • ROLLERCOASTER KILKENNY • ROUGH TRADE BRISTOL - LONDON - NOTTINGHAM • SEISMIC LEAMINGTON SPA • SISTER RAY LONDON • SLIDE BEDFORD • SMUGGLERS DEAL • SOUNDCLASH NORWICH • SOUND IT OUT STOCKTON ON TEES • SOUND KNOWLEDGE MALBOROUGH • SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE LONDON • SOUTH SOUTHEND • SPILLERS CARDIFF • SPINDIZZY DUBLIN • SQUARE WIMBORNE • STRANGER THAN PARADISE LONDON • SWORDFISH BIRMINGHAM • TALLBIRD CHESTERFIELD • TOWER DUBLIN • TRANSMISSION MARGATE • TRUCK STORE OXFORD • UNDERGROUND SOLU'SHN EDINBURGH • UNION MUSIC LEWES • VENUS VINYL LONDON • VINYL HUNTER BURY ST EDMUNDS • VINYLO SOUTHAMPTON • WAH WAH RECORDS WAKEFIELD • WORLD OF ECHO LONDON

LANKUM
THE LIVELONG DAY
Rough Trade

TUNE-YARDS
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU
4AD

FONTAINES D.C.
DOGREL
Partisan Records

ALESSANDRO CORTINI
VOLUME MASSIMO
Mute

CIGARETTES AFTER SEX
CRY
Partisan Records

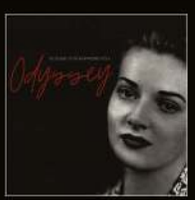
IDLES
A BEAUTIFUL THING:
IDLES LIVE AT LE BATACLAN
Partisan Records

THE DIVINE COMEDY
OFFICE POLITICS
Divine Comedy Records

THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES
TBNH
Acid Jazz

DANNY BROWN
UKNOWHATIMSAYIN¿
Warp

MARTIN FREEMAN AND EDDIE PILLER PRESENT
SOUL ON THE CORNER
Acid Jazz



VARIOUS ARTISTS
ODYSSEY: THE SOUND OF IVOR RAYMONDE VOL.2
Bella Union

CIRCA WAVES
WHAT'S IT LIKE OVER THERE?
Prolifica Inc.

ROZI PLAIN
WHAT A BOOST
Memphis Industries

YANN TIERSEN
PORTRAIT
Mute

RACONTEURS
HELP US STRANGER
Third Man Records

START WITH

The Pop Group's searingly experimental debut album *Y* has been given the reissue treatment. Founder members Mark Stewart and Gareth Sager tell **Jonathan Wright** about its recording and the band's early days

Listening back to the master tapes of *Y* was, says Pop Group frontman Mark Stewart, a revelatory experience. "The naked beauty of the raw songs stunned me and Gareth [Sager]," he recalls. Finding material unheard for 40 years was like eavesdropping on "psychic archaeology or the forbidden history of that period, a bit like when documents become declassified."

That it's taken so long for *Y* to be properly excavated is perhaps not surprising. Today, with the original LP brought into sharp focus by half-speed mastering at Abbey Road, *Y* still sounds ahead of its time, a fierce and wilfully experimental mix of punk, reggae, funk, free jazz and the avant-garde.

In April 1979, when it was first released via the recently founded WEA offshoot Radar Records, it sounded even more radical – or maybe *just as radical* might be a better way to put it. Yet, however you try to contextualise *Y*, it's hard to disagree with Stewart when, eschewing false modesty, he says simply: "It can't be bettered."

PUNK ROOTS

So just how did The Pop Group, Sager (guitar, keyboards and sax), Bruce Smith (drums), Stewart, Simon Underwood (bass) and John Waddington (guitar), arrive at the sound of *Y*? It's a story with its roots in the mid 1970s and in Bristol's unique musical mix.

In Sager's memory, the city during this period, when he was in his teens, was somewhere you never went out "without seeing a fight". Still, "There was a small underbelly of a gang of us that went to things like Roxy, Alex Harvey and Bowie gigs, but we also went to clubs where they played soul and funk and everyone danced."

By complete contrast, Stewart's memories are of "a very welcoming place with mates and family spread all over", but both convey the sense of a city primed for punk. "We didn't really see gender, class, race, blah blah blah as any kind of issue. It was more how cool your winkle-pickers were," he says, recalling a "50s fashion clubbing scene".

He adds: "That scene naturally mutated to punk and we were buying our clothes from the same faces in London as the bands up there, Acme Attractions [on the King's Road], Malcolm [McLaren's] and [designer] Lloyd Johnson's gaffs."

Every city in Britain had local punk heroes at this time, and in Bristol that meant The Cortinas. In 1977, the band released *Fascist Dictator* via indie label Step Forward prior to signing to CBS. "I remember coming back in the van with them from one of their gigs at [London's] Roxy," says Stewart, "and me, Gareth, Bruce and Simon discussing if we were ever to be a 'proper group', we should challenge all known concepts! That's what we believed punk meant – still do!"

However you best describe their music, The Pop Group were unquestionably not a pop group

FIRST STEPS

In short, The Pop Group's radicalism was built in from the off, an idea reinforced by Sager's observation that everyone in the band had elder siblings and heard lots of different kinds of music. Early on, he says, he was exposed to everything from Tamla to Stockhausen, French chanson to Indonesian music.

Then there were the politics of the years when Thatcherism was coming into sight. "Like all bands of this period, we survived because of the dole," says Sager. "I think we had a more beatnik, utopian, William Blake and anti-industrial way of seeing things, a personal politic of being young and not understanding why there was so much cruelty, slaughter and inequality in the world."

"Everything is political, every action you take," says Stewart.

In 1977, The Pop Group played their first shows. "Our first gig was in some youth club in some small village outside of Bristol," says Sager. "I think the average age of the audience was about nine – poor things!" Factory's Tony Wilson was among those who picked up on the band, he adds, so that, "I seem to remember playing Manchester more than Bristol."

From Stewart's perspective, there was an "amazing energy" to shows that were "a gathering of the clans", although he also recalls an "indoor riot" when The Pop Group supported Johnny Thunders. "I remember having to make my own clothes, as a lot of cool stuff wasn't made for giants," adds a man who, at around 6ft 6in tall, towers over most people he meets.

ON THE RADAR

Via manager Dick O'Dell, The Pop Group signed to Radar Records, co-founded by Andrew Lauder, the A&R man who signed The Stranglers and Buzzcocks to United Artists. Even now, the tie-up with Radar seems outlandish, yet it's worth remembering that The Pop Group's name wasn't, as is sometimes supposed, entirely ironic.

"I think The Pop Group went through five musical phases in three years," says Sager. "The second phase was pre-*Y*, when we could kind of write and play, and that was when we came up with songs like *Colour Blind*," he says, referencing a track from compilation *We Are Time* that's far closer to what most people think of as post-punk. "Back then, these were considered commercial, and bands like Joy Division and Echo went this direction, and made it pay. But I was never interested in being commercial, dumb naiveté on my part, I just wanted something that represented how we were feeling. I think we did that with *Y*."

BRIAN GRIFFIN

Producers under consideration included Conny Plank, famous for his work with Neu! and Kraftwerk. There was also the idea of having John Cale of The Velvet Underground fame produce and Dennis Bovell engineer, but Cale, says Sager, "wasn't in great shape". Eventually, the band settled on Bovell alone because, according to Stewart, the band "heard an Elisabeth Archer dub by Dennis and it blew our tiny minds".

In passing, there's a strange and neat symmetry here in that John Foxx recently told *Classic Pop* that, when Ultravox came to record *Systems Of Romance* with Plank, they also considered approaching Bovell.

LAYING DOWN TRACKS

In 1978, The Pop Group began recording with Bovell at Ridge Farm Studios in Surrey. "Dennis didn't turn up for the first three days," says Sager. "He was inventing lovers' rock and creating his big hit *Silly Games* with Janet Kay, but when he did eventually turn up it was intense – and fun, with us trying to bend all the rules of recording and turn them on their head."

Rather more poetically, Stewart's take on the sessions is that, "Rainbows of intuition sprung from our loins."

This may or may not be true, but *Y* is, as already observed, an extraordinary record, created by a process that Sager appears to suggest involved first disassembling what the band were doing. "The pre-recording sessions were at these hippy rehearsal rooms somewhere up in the Welsh hills," he says, "where we broke down the traditionally structured songs we had been writing. Then we took them several steps further in the studio, with Dennis dubbing them and particularly making it possible for me to make layers of sound that he mixed in and out of the tracks."

Sager singles out *Words Disobey Me* as his favourite track. "It grooves really well in 5/8 – we didn't know that at the time! – but then changes to a chant for 32 bars, and then there is the end groove, a riff I came up with in my bedroom."

For his part, Stewart prefers the searing *Boys From Brazil*. "If you can decipher the words, you might understand," he says. "The music, too. For me, it was our letter from nowhere – the screaming edge!"

AFTER THE EVENT

On its first release, many were unsure what to make of a record delivered by a band so ready to jump from this, or indeed any, edge. The *NME* called it "a brave failure" and *Y* sold modestly. The Pop Group left Radar for Rough Trade, a tie-up that saw second album *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?* (1980) hit number one in the independent charts. The band eventually imploded in 1981, only to re-form in 2010.

Yet the sway of *Y* has continued to grow over the years. In 2008, the critic Mark Fisher noted that while Joy Division's *Closer* is often seen as "the crown jewel of post-punk", *Y*, "inchoate with potential, the fire to Joy Division's ice, has an equal claim".

Those who have cited the record's influence include Every Band Ever From Bristol, notably Massive Attack, Minutemen's Mike Watt, Nick Cave and Sonic Youth. St Vincent has covered The Pop Group's debut single *She Is Beyond Good And Evil*.

Meanwhile, anyone who this year saw *Blood Money*, a site-specific piece featuring Stewart, Sager and sound artist Matthew Shaw, will testify that the latter-day Pop Group are still not averse to taking huge risks. There's a restlessness to both Stewart and Sager that's nothing less than admirable, and which you can see and hear online in the way the performance reinvents *Y*'s *Savage Sea*. "It's my life force, my heart is a massive bass drum," says Stewart of making music.

Whether others embrace this spirit is rather more open to question. "We threw down a whole body of armour and it seemed it was too heavy for anyone at the time," says Sager. It says much about *Y*'s enduring power that this may still be true today. ●

THE POP GROUP ON VINYL

The remastered and half-speed mastered boxset reissue of *Y* is spread across four discs: the original LP, *Y Live, Alien Blood*, an album of studio sessions and a 12" single, *She Is Beyond Good And Evil*. For those with £100 burning a hole in your back pocket, 500 copies have been pressed on gold vinyl and come complete with a set of signed art prints.

If you're interested in collecting older releases, you can pick up second album *For How Much Longer Do We Tolerate Mass Murder?* (Rough Trade, 1980) in near-mint condition for £25-£40, although mint copies complete with the four posters included in the original package are harder to source.

In terms of singles, a good copy of *We Are All Prostitutes* (Rough Trade/Y Records, 1979) on 7-inch shouldn't set you back more than around £10-£15. While copies of *Where There's A Will...*, a split single with The Slits' *In The Beginning There Was Rhythm* (Rough Trade/Y Records, 1980) will cost around the same.

For those who want to trace the band members' punk-funk afterlife, you can follow it through with groups such as Rip, Rig + Panic (featuring Neneh Cherry), Mark Stewart & The Mafia and Pigbag.

100 albums, but there can only be one winner. With the help of an expert panel of fellow vinyl obsessives, *Long Live Vinyl* hereby humbly present our annual shopping list to take directly to your local record shop…

How many times were we told in 2019 that democracy was dead? Well, here we are again to fly in the face of that weary world view. With the generous help of a carefully (hastily) assembled panel of record shops, labels, festival organisers, musicians, producers, writers and a couple of unscrupulous music PR types, this is *Long Live Vinyl*'s very own people's vote; 365 days of musical output sent to the country to decide on their favourite albums of 2019. All that was left once the votes were in was for the *Long Live Vinyl* crew to empty the ballot boxes, discount the spoiled papers and declare our winner.

You'll have to turn the pages to find out who won, but we'll say here that it was heartening to ask 40-odd different experts and get 40-odd different answers – a true sign of a musical landscape in rude health. Also pleasing is the fact that of the top 10, five are female or female-led acts. The genre spread is pretty wide, too, while young bands continue to underline that not everything was better "back in the day". Thanks again to our panel for taking the time to vote. And once you've reached the end, fear not, you can carry on straight into the Top 20 Reissues of 2019, Record Shop Of The Year and Hi-Fi Gear Of The Year features. What a time to be alive…

The panel

Gareth Murphy, Simon Raymonde, Rob Haywood, Steve Harnell, Laura Barton, Laura Williams, Liz Quigley, Chris Parkin, Rich Walker, Huw Baines, Felix Rowe, Giacomo Lee, Annette Lee, Ben Wardle, Duncan Jordan, Paddy Davis, Kate Price, Frankie Davison, Megan Page, Phoebe Scott, Colleen Murphy, Gary Tipp, Gary Walker, John Earls, Wyndham Wallace, Sam Willis, Tim Dellow, Dan Biggane, Glen Bushell, Noam Klar, Tom Dalgety, Simon Taffe, Sound It Out Records, Jumbo Records, Resident Records, Friendly Records, Sister Ray, Rough Trade West, Union Music, Tallbird Records, Gatefield Sounds, Longwell Records

100 Warmduscher
TAINTED LUNCH
THE LEAF LABEL

99 Ex:Re
EX:RE
4AD

98 Portico Quartet
MEMORY STREAMS
GONDWANA

97 75 Dollar Bill
I WAS REAL
TAK:TIL

96 Orville Peck
PONY
SUB POP

95 Jambinai
ONDA
BELLA UNION

94 Mark Lanegan Band
SOMEBODY'S KNOCKING
HEAVENLY

93 Gruff Rhys
PANG!
ROUGH TRADE

92 Oh Sees
FACE STABBER
CASTLE FACE

91 Anna Meredith
FIBS
MOSHI MOSHI

90 Patrick Watson
WAVE
DOMINO

89 Hiss Golden Messenger
TERMS OF SURRENDER
MERGE

88 American Football
LP3
POLYVINYL

87 Girl Ray
GIRL
MOSHI MOSHI

86 Yann Tiersen
ALL
MUTE

85 Pip Blom
BOAT
HEAVENLY

84 Edwyn Collins
BADBEA
AED

83 Drab Majesty
MODERN MIRROR
DAIS

82 Chromatics
CLOSER TO GREY
ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

81 Beck
HYPERSPACE
CAPITOL

80 Sudan Archives
ATHENA
STONES THROW

79 Loyle Carner
NOT WAVING, BUT DROWNING
VIRGIN EMI

78 Kim Gordon
NO HOME
MATADOR

77 Jesca Hoop
STONECHILD
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

76 Steve Mason
ABOUT THE LIGHT
DOUBLE SIX

75 Pond
TASMANIA
CAROLINE

74 Mattiel
SATIS FACTORY
HEAVENLY

73 Jane Weaver
LOOPS IN THE SECRET SOCIETY
FIRE RECORDS

72 Unkle
THE ROAD PART II
SONGS FOR THE DEF

71 Mercury Rev
THE DELTA SWEETE
BELLA UNION

70 The Menzingers
HELLO EXILE
EPITAPH

69 Joan Shelley
LIKE THE RIVER LOVES THE SEA
NO QUARTER

68 The Stroppies
WHOOSH!
TOUGH LOVE

67 Michael Chapman
TRUE NORTH
PARADISE OF BACHELORS

66 Kokoko!
FONGOLA
ROYAL MOUNTAIN

65 Fat White Family
SERFS UP!
DOMINO

64 Ride
THIS IS NOT A SAFE PLACE
WICHITA

63 Girl Band
THE TALKIES
ROUGH TRADE

62 Erland Cooper
SULE SKERRY
PHASES

61 Sandro Perri
SOFT LANDING
CONSTELLATION RECORDS

60 Fionn Regan
CALA
ABBEY RECORDS

59 The Raconteurs
HELP US STRANGER
THIRD MAN

58 Penelope Isles
UNTIL THE TIDE CREEPS IN
BELLA UNION

57 Will Burns & Hannah Peel
CHALK HILL BLUE
RIVERTONES

56 Strand Of Oaks
ERASERLAND
DEAD OCEANS

55 WH Lung
INCIDENTAL MUSIC
MELODIC

54 Moon Duo
STARS ARE THE LIGHT
SACRED BONES

53 Karen O & Danger Mouse
LUX PRIMA
BMG

52 Coldplay
EVERYDAY LIFE
PARLOPHONE

51 William Tyler
GOES WEST
MERGE

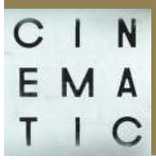
Past Winners

2017
LCD Soundsystem
American Dream

2018
IDLES
Joy As An Act Of Resistance

50 Rustin Man
DRIFT CODE
DOMINO
Former Talk Talk bassist Paul Webb's 2002 album with Portishead's Beth Gibbons, *Out Of Season*, was a stunning record. It took him 17 years to follow it up, but *Drift Code* is an equally enchanting album. Stepping out of the shadows to assume vocal responsibilities, Webb's piano-backed vignettes are richly detailed, finely crafted treasures.

49 The Cinematic Orchestra
TO BELIEVE
NINJA TUNE
It's clear from the softly swelling strings and Moses Sumney's haunting falsetto on the opening title track, that The Cinematic Orchestra's first album since 2007 is a special record. Elsewhere, Heidi Vogel's rich vocal graces the soulful *A Promise* and a sombre Roots Manuva stars on the excellent *A Caged Bird/ Imitations Of Life*. Majestic.

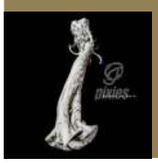


48 The Twilight Sad
IT WON/T BE LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME
ROCK ACTION
It's a tale of taking the long road for the Glaswegians as album number five finally sees their Robert Smith-endorsed "miserable shite" make the breakthrough. There's a confident stridency cutting through the gloom, with Andy McFarlane's shoegaze-y guitars towering over everything.

47 Snapped Ankles
STUNNING LUXURY
THE LEAF LABEL
Having blown our domes with their scintillating debut and introduced the world to the log synth, the woody experimentalists rail against the gentrification of East London on their follow-up. It's no less thrilling or intoxicating, as throbbing krautrock and expansive dystopian electronica collide. Singer Austin could be our new Mark E Smith.

46 Steve Gunn
THE UNSEEN INBETWEEN
MATADOR
The former Kurt Vile band member hits his stride with this latest entry in a vast solo catalogue. Gunn's thoughtful Americana is an exercise in restraint, yet when his guitar playing takes centre stage it's truly superlative. *New Moon* showcases that flowing fretwork, while the laconic *Vagabond* became one of the anthems of the summer.

45 Pixies
BENEATH THE EYRIE
BMG
The second act of the Pixies continues the upward curve, lead singles *On Graveyard Hill* and *Catfish Kate* solid entries in one of the most potent singles catalogues in rock. Joey Santiago is unleashed to terrifying effect on *Long Rider* and they toy with rockabilly on *St Nazaire*. In 2019, the Pixies sound comfortable in their own skin.



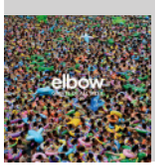
44 Bon Iver
I,I
JAGJAGUWAR
How far Justin Vernon has travelled from the cabin isolation and acoustic guitars of the sublime *For Emma, Forever Ago*. Yet despite the sizable collaborative cast and opaque structures, *I,I* is a more orthodox, compelling piece than 2016's *22, A Million*. Mid-album trio *Hey, Ma*; *U (Man Like)* and *Naeem* are among his finest despite the silly names.

43 The Murder Capital
WHEN I HAVE FEARS
HUMAN SEASON
The latest post-punk hopes to emerge from Dublin, The Murder Capital push beyond the boundaries of the genre on an exhilarating, razor-sharp debut. Everything here is inspired by the suicide of a close friend and the band, who are a thrilling, partially terrifying live act, play like five men determined to squeeze every last drop out of life.

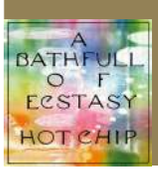
42 Kate Tempest
THE BOOK OF TRAPS AND LESSONS
FICTION
With a Mercury-nominated album and a superb novel under her belt, Kate Tempest expertly gauges the mood in the UK on album two: a people existing "in the mouth of a breaking storm". Teamed with Rick Rubin, it's a deeply troubling essay on humanity, yet somehow Tempest's faith endures.

41 Jessica Pratt
QUIET SIGNS
MEXICAN SUMMER
Early in the year, the LA songwriter lured us into a somnambulant dream world that we've not escaped since. The simple arrangements underpinning Pratt's transportive vocals cloak the depth of the compositions on her third and finest LP, as acoustic guitars, strings and synths flicker and shift. An alluring antidote to the clamour of modern life.

40 Elbow
GIANTS OF ALL SIZES
POLYDOR
As soon as we heard swaggering lead single *Dexter & Sinister* it was clear this would be a stylistically varied triumph. All four members contribute songs to possibly their best record yet, and on *White Noise White Heat* Guy Garvey fumes at corporate greed and Tory power struggles. Our most thoughtful arena band are back.



39 Hot Chip
A BATH FULL OF ECSTASY
DOMINO
The introduction of co-producers Philippe Zdar and Rodaidh McDonald reinvigorates Alexis Taylor and Joe Goddard on an album that yields some of their finest kaleidoscopic pop moments to date. The opening *Melody Of Love* and closer *No God* bookend an album that's a vibrant celebration of positivity in these chastened times.



HANLY BANKS CALLAHAN

How Was 2019 For You?

Bill Callahan

How has your 2019 been?
"Just grand. I released a double album, toured the world and got called a poopyhead by my son."

Any highs and lows?
"Lows were the frothings of failed humans on all sides of the political spectrum. Finishing my record was the high."

The response to this record seems to have been overwhelmingly positive. We recently saw that Jarvis Cocker included it in a list of his all-time favourite albums. How has it been to see this album resonate so much with people?
"It's nice to know. I sat with these songs for a long time so that maybe other people would, too."

Domesticity and fatherhood appear to have played a role on the writing of this record, how has returning to touring impacted on that part of your life?
"It's not good practice for me to go away for too long, but it is good practice for me to get away some. I need some variety in my day-to-day. The tours were shorter with breaks in between. Family is strong, but like anything strong it needs constant tending."

This album also touched upon returning to being creative again after a period of less activity. Has that boosted you and given you a surge of momentum, or would you be happy to take a break again?
"I wouldn't say I was on a break. I always work. What I search for in my music is what I search for in everything else: relationships, art, exercise, eating, sleeping. So I am always on the one track. Sometimes it produces music and sometimes it doesn't. It's true that I was on a break from publicly having new songs, yes, and on a break from the responsibility that brings with it. In working out how to be a daddy and make music, I not only opened the door to *Shepherd* but to future releases also. So I'm good for now."

Like many, we were very saddened to hear of the loss of David Berman, who was your friend. The musical loss is huge, but what will you miss most about him?
"His music is fantastic. I missed it when he didn't make it for 10 years while alive. What I'll miss most is he was a wildcard. You never knew what kind of trip he was going to bring you into. It could be black times or the fireworks of his mind. He loved deeply, he hated deeply too, but was coming around a lot more toward mostly love towards the end. He thought deeply, too, and always had insightful takes on things. Maybe his love was more an adoration."

What have been some of your favourite albums released this year?
"Blacks' Myths, *Blacks' Myths II*. Also Joan Shelley, *Like The River Loves The Sea*, Jake Xerxes Fussell, *Out Of Sight* and Billie Eilish."

Any other cultural highlights from 2019?
"Those *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* books are fun. I also liked Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*."

You've just completed your first year on Twitter. How's that been for you?
"It's a distraction. It's channel surfing. Sometimes it can be fun. I try to pick up a book instead, because books turn me from wonder bread to whole wheat."

How Was 2019 For You?

Weyes Blood

How has your 2019 been?
"It's been a blur of madness and delight! I've spent most of the time touring and making clips for the songs off *Titanic Rising*. Lots of creative juices flowed this year. It was also a tremendous year in terms of the climate crisis, with some harrowing societal realisations. I have a lot of hope for 2020. You can sense a fever pitch, we're past the raising awareness phase and moving into action. Denial is less an option. A lot of things happened this year that could deter hope, but I choose to hold onto some of the good things that happened — maybe it's personally breaking through my own fears."

Any highs and lows?
"Definitely some extreme highs coupled with extreme lows, so it goes. I'm very grateful to be given this opportunity to tour and play my music, and the high moments make it worth it. I played on TV for the first time, which felt pretty insane. The shows have been really incredible and the general reception of the album keeps me elated at times, but we've also had 24-hour travel days with multiple delayed flights, and then to top it all off the airline loses all of our equipment by the time we finally make it back to LA and everyone's in a dark headspace. What goes up must go down!"

The response to this record seems to have been overwhelmingly positive. Do you feel people have 'got' what you were shooting for with this?
"I use a lot of stream of consciousness writing techniques. The mechanics of people interpreting my music is similarly random. Everyone takes away something different, and I like that surrealistic reaction. I'm really heartened and glad when people pick up exactly what I'm throwin' down, it's a nice affirmative feeling. But I also like that people can relate with different associations."

How's the response to it been for you?
"I try to stay low key, if I read it all I'd go crazy. I do check some interviews to see how things I said get taken out of context. It's inevitable, but generally I feel like I've gotten my message across."

How has your relationship to the record changed over the year?
"I've become more accepting of what it is, being further away from creating it. There's always a lot of choices when recording that are easy to stress about in the moment, but time smooths that out. I get to bask in some relief now that I think more about how the next record will be different."

How has bringing this album to life on the road been?
"It's like a water reflection – it was interesting at first accepting the smaller scale, but I discovered the songs have legs and stand well stripped down."

What have been your favourite albums released this year?
"Lana Del Rey*;* Big Thief, *U.F.O.F.;* Lizzo; Tyler The Creator; Aldous Harding…"

Any other cultural highlights from 2019?
"*Midsommar*, Greta Thunberg, Jane Fonda, Ukrainian investigation whistle blower…"

Have you written any songs for your next album yet?
"I'm starting the brew, putting rudimentary beginnings in the cauldron. I've had so little time to write, everything is voice memos and short poems."

What are you most looking forward to about 2020?
"Having time to write and hide in the woods. Also, it's been incredible getting a greater grip of my grief over the climate crisis. There's a lot to be hopeful about."

ELIOT LEE HAZEL

Richard Hawley
FURTHER
38

BMG

He may have turned 50 this year, but 2019 finds Sheffield's finest as full of life as his beloved dogs. Shorter and sharper than recent outings, *Further* bristles with energy. It also has some of Hawley's strongest songs: the opening pair of *Off My Mind* and *Alone*, the bluesy *Galley Girl* and supreme *Time Is*. He still has the best guitar sound in music, too.

Black Midi
SCHLAGENHEIM
37

ROUGH TRADE

Hyped to buggery and long awaited, Black Midi's debut is a challenging listen that veers provocatively between post-punk, jazz, prog and gospel, driven by the skittering rhythms of drummer Morgan Simpson and lead vocalist Geordie Greep's Buckley-esque falsetto. The band's range is remarkable, their live shows enigmatic. Where will they go next?

The Black Keys
LET'S ROCK
36

NONESUCH

We were pleasantly surprised when news of a first Black Keys LP in five years emerged. And *Let's Rock* is a joyous, back-to-basics celebration of all that made Dan Auerbach and Pat Carney one of the biggest bands on the planet. Just listen to *Shine A Light* for evidence, a heady 150-second distillation of their blues-soul-rock template.

Liam Gallagher
WHY ME? WHY NOT.
35

WARNER

The sibling squabbles with Noel became ever-more tedious in 2019, but this is our kid's best work yet. From the defiant stomp of opener *Shockwave*, through the lighter-shaded *Meadow* and *Alright Now* to poppy *Now That I've Found You* it's a big step up from *As You Were*. *One Of Us*, with its *Live Forever* reference, is of course about Noel, though.

On The Record Richard Hawley

When we caught up with Richard in issue 28, he was in upbeat form: "I was determined to make something positive. I didn't want to be sat in a studio recording dirges, as they suck the life out of me. I know it sounds cheesy, but if you've got a light in your heart, it's easy to be positive."

Tyler The Creator
IGOR
34

COLUMBIA

Issuing instructions to listen to your album without distraction may be a bit of a narcissistic move, but *Igor* rewards total focus. It's a dense, ambitious work with an impressive contributor list including Kanye West, Pharrell Williams and Solange, while Tyler's attention to detail and instinct for digging out killer samples shines.

Slowthai
NOTHING GREAT ABOUT BRITAIN
33

METHOD

Calling the Queen a naughty word on your debut is certainly bold, but make no mistake, this is a brilliantly observed record. Written by a young rapper whose love of punk-rock and his home town of Northampton coalesce, it's a scathing, emotive and at times brutally funny portrait of broken Britain.

Julia Jacklin
CRUSHING
32

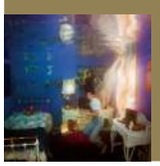
POLYVINYL

"I don't want to be touched all the time/ I raised my body up to be mine." Aussie singer-songwriter Jacklin's second album is a tale of claustrophobia and wanting to escape unwanted attention. Made with producer Burke Reid, it sees a vastly gifted observational writer coming of age, mining past relationships for inspiration.

Weyes Blood
TITANIC RISING
31

SUB POP

Natalie Mering classifies *Titanic Rising* as "The Kinks meet WWII or Bob Seger meets Enya", "futuristic and ancient" at the same time. It's an achingly beautiful album that fuses conversational songwriting with abstract imagery and sweeping instrumentation. Also check out her *Rough Trade Session* (sadly not available on vinyl yet).



Deerhunter
WHY HASN'T EVERYTHING ALREADY DISAPPEARED?
30

4AD

Strange, disorientating and genre curious, Deerhunter's eighth album is almost certainly their best since the outstanding *Halcyon Digest*. The curiously British, brass-flecked 60s pop of *No One's Sleeping* concerns the murder of MP Jo Cox and *Greenpoint Gothic* is an off-kilter synth-pop wonder.

Bruce Springsteen
WESTERN STARS
29

COLUMBIA

The weathered charms and wide open spaces of *Hitch Hikin'* set the ball rolling on the Boss' 19th album, and boy is it a good one. Backed by sweeping strings and piano, it's wholly evocative of life on the road and the mood endures throughout *Western Stars*. Small-town dramas, big skies and half-drunk beers, all human life is here.

Wilco
ODE TO JOY
28

dBPm

It's back to the day job for Jeff Tweedy, but something of his solo excursions is evident on this patient, often languid folky set. Tweedy's gently husky voice is delightful and there's a warm charm to the minimalist production. Fans of 2016's *Schmilco* will revel in the stripped-back restraint, which Nels Cline briefly escapes on *We Were Lucky*.

CHRIS SAUDERS

27 Cigarettes After Sex
CRY
PARTISAN

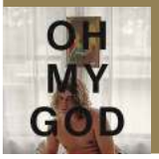
We're still wholly in love with Cigarettes After Sex's debut album at *Long Live Vinyl*, and this is a second serving of sublime reverb-bathed lullabies. Greg Gonzalez' film background informs these cinematic vignettes, the guitar work utterly dreamy and his sleepy cooing vocal spinning tales of love, sex and heartbreak.

26 Thom Yorke
ANIMA
XL RECORDINGS

Believe it or not, there are glimpses of humour in the ice-cool electronica of Yorke's third solo outing, not least the title *I Am A Very Rude Person*. Addressing "a sense of anxiety… expressed through a dystopian environment", while it's at times under-formed, there's plenty to confirm that his electronic adventures are no mere indulgence.

25 Kevin Morby
OH MY GOD
DEAD OCEANS

A concept album about religion, written on a series of Transatlantic flights may sound a stretch, but Kansas troubadour Morby is one of the most adept writers of modern times, a worthy recipient of the folksinger torch passed by his heroes Dylan, Mitchell and Reed. He's in inspired form on the fifth album in what's becoming a seriously good catalogue.



24 The Chemical Brothers
NO GEOGRAPHY
VIRGIN EMI

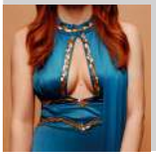
Comfortably their best album since 2005's *Push The Button*, followed by a pulverising Glastonbury headline set – it's fair to say The Chemical Brothers are back and retirement plans shelved. With guest vocalists kept to a minimum, *No Geography* is full of veritable bangers, not least mega lead single *Free Yourself*. Nobody does it better.

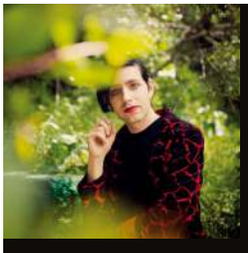
23 Ezra Furman
TWELVE NUDES
BELLA UNION

After the disappointing *Transangelic Exodus*, Ezra Furman comes roaring back with 28 breathless minutes of frantic, angry rock 'n' roll. Amid the fury of *Calm Down* and *Rated R Crusaders*, Ezra finds space for the yearning pair of *I Wanna Be Your Girlfriend* and *What Can You Do But Rock 'N' Roll?* A vital riposte to the forces of hatred.

22 Jenny Lewis
ON THE LINE
WARNER

The former Rilo Kiley frontwoman continues to scale the heights following a five-year hiatus. This time round, she's enlisted an A-list group of contributors including Beck, Ringo Starr and the disgraced Ryan Adams. Nobody steals Lewis' limelight on an astonishingly strong collection, with piano ballad *Hollywood Lawn* and *Do Si Do* irresistible.





On The Record
Ezra Furman

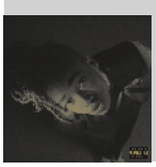
"As dark as *Transangelic Exodus* [2018] was sometimes, I had a strong impulse to kinda rally the troops and say, 'Don't despair, we're going to make it together'," Ezra Furman told us back in the summer. "But this... things are bad and some irreversible catastrophes have happened. How bad does that really feel? I know we're supposed to be positive and constructive, but I've started to realise that I also need to make space to feel negative. I'm a realist, a dark optimist, I would say. I feel like there's something positive or forward thinking in going into negativity like this. If you don't know there's an emergency, you can't react to it. After making a very studied record, I just got the urge, or impulse, of rock 'n' roll, like, 'Let's just fuckin' do it'. Don't think about it too carefully. We were naturally feeling like, 'Man, I wanna play'."

21 Bill Callahan
SHEPHERD IN A SHEEPSKIN VEST
DRAG CITY

A poignant reflection on fatherhood, marriage and the loss of his mother from the Smog songwriter, whose voice is a rich and evocative counterpart to the DIY production. "The panic room is now a nursery," Callahan intones of a life of revised priorities, the quality of his insight undiluted.

20 Little Simz
GREY AREA
AGE 101

A strong contender to Dave's *Pyschodrama* for rap album of the year, North London's Simbi Ajikawo delivers a strikingly honest message on *Grey Area*. In her own words, "I said it with my chest/ I don't care who I offend". Its influences diverse, *Grey Area* is due vindication for a rapper who has been quietly honing her craft.

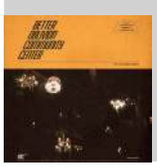


19 Modern Nature
HOW TO LIVE
BELLA UNION

This ambitious debut sees Ultimate Painting main man Jack Cooper team up with BEAK>'s Will Young (no, not that one) and elegantly mash together pastoral folk, driving krautrock rhythms and exploratory jazz. Probing the blurred lines between urban and rural landscapes, the whole thing becomes an immersive otherworldly cycle.

18 Better Oblivion Community Center
BETTER OBLIVION COMMUNITY CENTER
MATADOR

No simple side project, these 10 wistful songs are the real McCoy, Connor Oberst and Phoebe Bridgers' voices melding effortlessly. *My City* is divine drivetime radio fare and Bridgers is in fine heart-rending form on *I Didn't Know What I Was In For*.



DANIEL TOPETE

How Was 2019 For You?

Fontaines DC

What's been the best moment of 2019?
"It's been so non-stop that it's all a blur, but it was probably at the start of the year when we toured Europe. It was just the five of us, with no crew. Everything went wrong, but we put it all to one side and rolled with everything that came. From that, we learned there was no point in getting stressed. If something wasn't going to work, it wasn't going to work, and there was no point worrying about it."

Did *Dogrel* achieve everything you wanted it to? "As a record, yeah. When we finished it, I was completely satisfied, as it represents everything we wanted it to. And what it's done commercially, that was a lot more than we expected."

What's your relationship like with Partisan Records? With bands like IDLES, Cigarettes After Sex and Eagulls, it seems like a community there...
"Yeah, it's very much like that. We've got a great relationship, especially with the owner, Tim [Putnam]. They're people that I love and trust, we like being around them and that's important. If we didn't have that, it would have been very difficult to get as much done as we have."

"There's a dreamlike atmosphere to the new record, as that's what this year has felt like. The record feels like a dream that sometimes goes into nightmares"

***Dogrel* is specific to Dublin. Will that still be the case in your new songs?**
"No. The new record is very different, both musically and lyrically. It's strayed a lot from being based in a time and a place. We don't have that experience anymore, because we just aren't based in one place and time. There's a dreamlike atmosphere to the new record, as that's what this year has felt like. The record feels like a dream that sometimes goes into nightmares and fairytales. It's been a very up-and-down year. There's been no time for any break, so it's been madness at times and we've felt quite lost. But it's been magical as well."

When will you get chance to record the new album?
"Well, we did it all in October. That's been my real favourite moment of 2019, making the new record. I don't know how we've found time to do it all, but we have. We've made it in LA, as this record is a lot more influenced by The Beach Boys, so we wanted to go to California. These songs are much more considered, in the details of the song arrangements."

Did you get any time to live the LA rock star lifestyle?
"No. We were in the studio for 12 hours a day and slept the other 12. Working with Dan Carey on *Dogrel*, his home became our home, his family became our family and he became a very caring person in our lives. This one was a bit different. We were very invested in our time and it was all about the record for those couple of weeks."

Who's the biggest vinyl fan in the band?
"We all enjoy buying records and we all love the way you listen to records. Our drummer Tom [Coll] and I used to share a house together. We never had a TV, just a record player, so the first thing you'd do when you got home was put a record on. That's how I spent my days, and if I get a break I'll do more of that."

▶

How Was 2019 For You?

Lynval Golding, The Specials

What's been your highlight of 2019?
"The joy of making *Encore* was that there was no stress. Because of our 40th anniversary, *Encore* making No 1 meant a lot to us. The shows have been wonderful, too. I know exactly what my two favourite Specials concerts are. In 2009, the first night in Newcastle was absolutely incredible. And now, the second of our four nights in Coventry. I did *B.L.M (Black Lives Matter)* on the day when my father would have been 95, and that song is for my old man."

What was your favourite album of 2019?
"The Skints are a wonderful bunch of guys, and *Swimming Lessons* is beautiful music. It's so nice to see the next generation take over, so I hope Easy Life make a beautiful album next year. He didn't make an album, but you can't forget Stormzy. He blew me away at Glastonbury. The way he mixes grime and rock is like how Bob Marley brought reggae from Jamaica to the arenas. I look back on The Specials and, much like The Clash, we had that universal appeal too. That's what I love about Stormzy, how he makes it all connect."

What has disappointed you this year?
"We had some humour in *Vote For Me* on *Encore*, but it's very strange times for the world right now. I look at our so-called leaders in Britain and America and I think, "Is it all about who can tell the biggest lies?" But if the revolution is going to be a bloodbath, I don't want to see that happen. I don't believe in death and destruction, I want to keep everything peaceful."

What vinyl bargains have you found this year?
"I had a lovely afternoon in San Francisco when I had some spare time in a record shop. Steve Craddock is amazing for vinyl – he brings records on tour to play in our dressing room. Wherever he goes, he finds something."

What did you think of Coventry City's football kit celebrating 2-Tone's 40th anniversary?
"I'm disgusted with them – they haven't even sent me one! Maybe they've heard me and my 20-year-old son are Chelsea fans…"

What does 2020 have in store for The Specials?
"Me and Terry are swapping ideas for a new record. We want to get to the sunny side of the road and add more colour into the world, as it's very dark and grey right now. We want to put some light into the world.

"Our only hope right now is to try to write songs that can touch people and put some colour into their lives. *We Sell Hope* on *Encore* contains some beautiful words about giving love to each other. That gives us a platform to brighten up people's lives a little bit."

When do you think the new album might arrive?
"We're getting on with it now and we're pushing to deliver the next batch of songs around June. I love the way people like Liam Gallagher are able to go from one album to the next. It only took us 30-odd years to get to *Encore*, but obviously there were clashes and problems that didn't allow us to write so quick for most of that time!"

DANIEL TOPETE

17 Cate Le Bon
REWARD
MEXICAN SUMMER

The Welsh songwriter's own unique language illuminates this more stripped back and intimate follow-up to 2016's wonderful *Crab Day*. From the analogue synths and parping sax of opener *Miami*, Le Bon deftly walks the line between discordant weirdness and beatific pop moments, the landscape rich with textures and shimmering melodies.

16 The National
I AM EASY TO FIND
4AD

Just when you thought you had The National pegged as expert purveyors of male melancholy, they deliver an album where female vocalists take the spotlight, accompanied by a film about womanhood. Bold, clever, intricate and moving, it's further evidence that the Ohio quintet are one of the smartest bands on the planet.

15 Billie Eilish
WHEN WE ALL FALL ASLEEP, WHERE DO WE GO?
INTERSCOPE

The world's second most famous teenager (hello, Greta) announces her arrival with this remarkable debut record. Pop, skittering R&B, bass-heavy club bangers and G-Funk jostle, while the writing is astonishingly astute: "All the good girls go to hell/ Because even God herself has enemies".

On The Record: Foals

"It's starting to feel like we're the last of a dying breed," Foals told *Long Live Vinyl* back in issue 26, "and that makes us feel even tighter. We love it, and until something happens to change that, I can't see us doing anything else. We're very harsh critics of ourselves and, because we've played so many shows, we're aware that having energy is the core of the band.

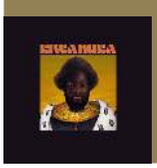
"*Holy Fire* [2013] and *What Went Down* [2015] are from the same place, and we didn't want to make another album like that. It was time for a change. There are songs on some of our records I'd never really listened to, because at the time it felt they hadn't gone the way we wanted. But after time away from it all, you look back at them and go, 'Actually, that's great!'. It was important to reset ourselves. If you've not made a record for three years, you don't want to feel like you're relying on old, recycled ideas. This time, we resolved to finish everything we started."

14 Flying Lotus
FLAMAGRA
WARP

Stephen Ellison once again proves himself the grand master of juxtaposition on a vertiginous odyssey that skips intoxicatingly between breathless jittery funk, hip-hop synth passages and becalming open spaces. With guests including Solange, George Clinton, Toro Y Moi, Thundercat and David Lynch, it's a record that reveals itself with repeated listens.

13 Michael Kiwanuka
KIWANUKA
POLYDOR

Kiwanuka smashes through the soulful glass ceiling set by his opening pair of albums on his third, setting the controls for the stratosphere. With Danger Mouse producing, it's a rueful examination of the human condition, the lens training on racism and immigration. It's the work of a writer taking his place at the very top table.



12 Dave
PSYCHODRAMA
NEIGHBOURHOOD

This is some record. An impassioned exploration of mental health, race and abusive relationships interspersed with conversations with a psychotherapist, it's an eloquent, sombre masterpiece. Dave's flow is wrapped in sparse piano and spectral production and in the outstanding *Black*, he has written a defining, truly vital anthem.

11 Foals
EVERYTHING NOT SAVED WILL BE LOST PT1 & PT2
WARNER

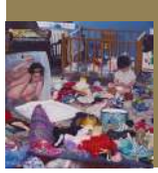
The boys from Oxford continue their march towards world domination and inevitably a Glastonbury headline slot with a two-part payload. *Part 1* sees the band indulging their dancier side before unleashing the big guns on *Part 2*, singles *The Runner* and *Black Bull* leading the way. Pilton awaits.

10 Richard Dawson
2020
WEIRD WORLD

North East troubadour Richard Dawson follows up the medieval folk of *Peasant* with an expert sketch of Brexitland Britain. An anxious jogger, a warehouse worker, a son worried about his dad's critique of his football skills… Dawson's portrayal of the minutiae of everyday life is little short of genius, his tunes never more melodically charming.

9 Sharon Van Etten
REMIND ME TOMORROW
JAGJAGUWAR

The Brooklyn singer-songwriter sheds the checked shirt, acoustic guitar and yearning songs about lost loves on this gothic, electro-pop reawakening. With producer John Congleton at the controls, from the arrival of lead single *Comeback Kid*, it's a new more confident Sharon, demons slayed, striding into the future with renewed purpose.



8 Fontaines DC
DOGREL
PARTISAN

"I'm gonna be big," Grian Chatten spits on opening salvo *Big*. Damn right he is. The Dublin post-punkers seem destined to follow labelmates IDLES into the major league. Beyond the snarling high-speed clatter, though, lies an incisive writer with a literary mind. That rare collision marks out Fontaines as one of guitar music's greatest hopes.

Angel Olsen
ALL MIRRORS
JAGJAGUWAR

7

"In every way, from the making of it, to the words, to how I feel moving forward, this record is about owning up to your darkest side, finding the capacity for new love and trusting change even when you feel like a stranger." Missouri songwriter Angel Olsen has undergone something of a reinvention on her fourth album. Like fellow Jagjaguwar artist Sharon Van Etten, that new direction involves John Congleton, along with the orchestration of Jherek Bischoff, Ben Babbitt and a 14-piece orchestra. It sees what was initially intended to be a pair of versions of the LP, one solo and one with a band, become just one, Olsen realising she "needed to separate these two records and release *All Mirrors* in its heaviest form". What has happened to that more sparse version, we don't yet know, but on this incarnation, the indie-rock and heavy-hearted folk of Olsen's earlier material is replaced by sweeping strings and grand arrangements, with an airy Phil Spector drum sound entering the mix. While the overriding theme is woozy 80s synths and a reverb-bathed vocal, changes in direction are frequent, certainty rejected, Olsen realising on *Spring*, "I'm beginning to wonder if anything's real". It's at once both her most expansive and intimate record to date.

The Specials
ENCORE
UNIVERSAL

6

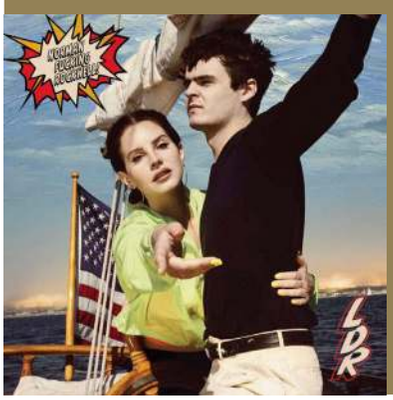
LLV's John Earls predicted he'd reviewed one of the albums of the year back in February when *Encore* arrived, and so it proved. A surprise release after a decade of touring since The Specials reformed in 2008, *Encore* is the perfect celebration of the 40th anniversary of 2-Tone from the band that most potently epitomised both genre and label. And how the public mood and political malaise the UK is afflicted by in 2019 need their voice. Their social commentary has never sounded more prescient, the similarities with 1979 impossible to ignore. *Black Skin Blue Eyed Boy* is transcendent dance music, while Lynval Golding takes down an ignorant racist on *B.L.M.* Young activist Saffiyah Khan, who confronted the EDL wearing a Specials T-shirt, is a brilliantly judged guest vocalist on *The Ten Commandments*. *The Lunatics Have Taken Over The Asylum*, too, is superb. Indeed, there isn't a misstep among the 10 tracks of an album that couldn't be by anyone other than The Specials. On the stately closer *We Sell Hope*, Terry Hall delivers his verdict on Brexit Britain: "Looked all around the world, it could be a beautiful place to live". We can only wonder what sort of record this would have been with the involvement of the absent Specials, but it's hard to imagine a better one.

CAMERON McCOOL

Lana Del Rey
NORMAN FUCKING ROCKWELL!

POLYDOR

"Why wait for the best when I could have you?" Lana Del Rey asks in a withering dart fired the way of a one-time lover "self-loathing poet" and "resident Laurel Canyon know-it-all" on the title track of her fifth album. It's a typically sharp, knowing line from an album full of such well-conceived dispatches. Elsewhere, on *Happiness Is A Butterfly*, she wonders "If he's a serial killer then what's the worst/ That can happen to a girl who's already hurt?" Lana's wonderfully droll on *Hope Is A Dangerous Thing For A Woman Like Me To Have – But I Have It,* too, remarking: "Hello, it's the most famous woman you know on the iPad". The slings and arrows of romance are always central to Lana Del Rey's albums and that's again the case here, but it's a more nuanced piece, majestic in its exploration of matters of the heart. There's even a brief nod to the climate crisis in the closing moments of *The Greatest,* where "LA is in flames". The nine-minute *Venice Bitch* is a quite stunning song that spirals away into a fizzing electronic coda that's nigh-on hypnotic, Del Rey singing of "crimson and clover". "I moved to California, but it's just a state of mind," she sighs on *Fuck It I Love You*, and this is a modern-day masterpiece conceived in the Golden State.

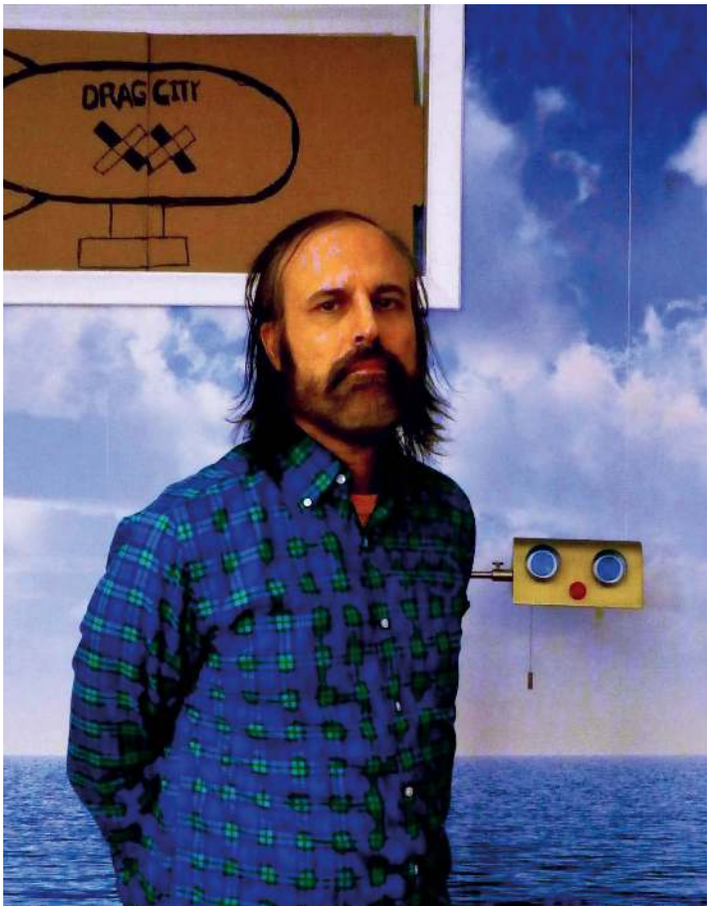


Aldous Harding
DESIGNER

4AD

"It's like the start of my relationship with Aldous Harding and the world. And we've got lots of time to get to know each other," the New Zealand artist who so consistently defies categorisation told *Long Live Vinyl* when we met up with her earlier this year. *Designer* is in many ways a playful album, certainly more so than 2017's sophomore *Party*, yet never trivial nor throwaway; it's closer to psych-tinged 60s folk than its predecessor. At times, as we've come to expect with the now Cardiff-dwelling artist, the lyrical content remains impenetrable. "I know you have the dove, I'm not getting wet … show the ferret to the egg, I'm not getting led along," Harding sings on lead single *The Barrel*. And on *Treasure*: "I made it again to the Amazon, I've got to erase the same as the others". Harding's voice, too, inhabits innumerable stylistic territories, while remaining absolutely her own. There's something alluring in this hard-to-fathom world. This is an album that you could spend months trying to unravel and still be none the wiser, its multi-layered subjects, origins and meanings mysteriously opaque. In the company of long-term PJ Harvey ally John Parish, an inscrutable artist grows more compelling with every release.

MAT HAYWARD/GETTY CLARE SHILLAND



8 Purple Mountains
PURPLE MOUNTAINS
DRAG CITY

It was a terrible, gut-wrenching irony that David Berman's return after an 11-year musical hiatus with one of the finest records of his lifetime came just a month before his suicide in August. The signs on what is a supreme, literate and deeply touching album had been there from a man who had before attempted suicide. On the opening track, he admits to having "fucked myself" and being "the same old mess", while titles such as *Darkness And Cold, Maybe I'm The Only One For Me* and *All My Happiness Is Gone* were strong hints that all was not well with Berman, who had amassed a huge debt and had been living alone in a room at his label Drag City's offices in Chicago. The Silver Jews founder's lyrical phrasing is deeply evocative throughout this sole Purple Mountains LP. On the latter song, he speak-sings of the "icy bike-chain rain of Portland, Oregon" and on the former he laments "the light of my life going out tonight in a pink champagne corvette". The pleasure is taken with the pain throughout this personal and poignant collection, with *I Loved Being My Mother's Son* a heart-wrenching highlight, rivalled closely by the plaintive beauty of *Snow Is Falling In Manhattan*. A rare talent stolen from us, leaving behind this farewell and perhaps his finest work.

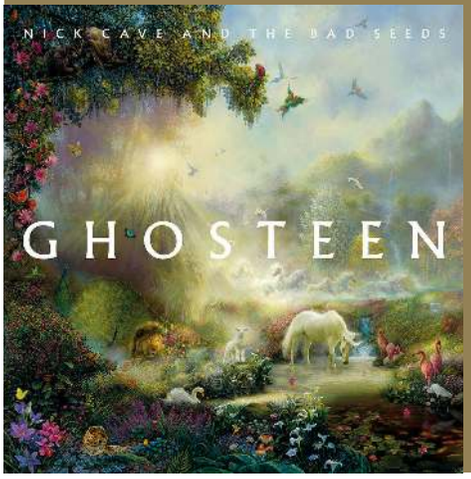
9 Big Thief
TWO HANDS
4AD

There was no doubting the subject matter at the heart of the second of the New York band's two albums this year: the shameful mess we've made of planet Earth. Adrianne Lenker's songwriting reaches a peak on this spirited call to action, never before has she sounded so urgent, to the point and determined. Recorded in the desert heat of Sonic Ranch in El Paso, Texas, *Two Hands* captures a near-telepathic band who've honed their sound through almost constant touring these past few years. Seething live favourite *Not* finally makes it onto a Big Thief album, replete with its gloriously unhinged guitar solo and dark incantations of fire lapping at the creek and a planet that's stopped spinning. Elsewhere, *Forgotten Eyes* is the most anthemic thing they've done since the excellent *Shark Smile* from 2017's *Capacity*, already two albums ago. Big Thief have given us four records of the highest quality in as many years and they've no intention of letting up, Lenker working tirelessly on sharpening her pen. "I feel like I'm getting closer to something. I can imagine singing these songs when I'm 70," she told *Long Live Vinyl* when we caught up with the band at Green Man Festival in August. Just imagine how many albums Big Thief will have by then…

DC BERMAN MICHAEL BUISHAS

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds
GHOSTEEN
GHOSTEEN INC

A clear and undisputed winner of our 2019 Album Of The Year prize. If only it hadn't been inspired by such tragic and cruel circumstances. The first album written in full by Cave since the death of his teenage son Arthur in 2015, *Ghosteen* is nothing short of a masterpiece, overtly and absolutely concerned with the crushing heartbreak the great Australian gothic poet will forever carry with him. "There's nothing wrong with loving something you can't hold in your hand," he asserts on the title track, and this double album is a harrowing, consistently affecting listen throughout, a follow-up to 2016's stellar *Skeleton Tree* that pushes the songwriting bar still higher, largely because of the brutality of its honesty.



Faced with such a devastating event, many would have hidden. Cave has done the opposite. Having spent long years building a persona that was a mix of brimstone preacher, sinister carny and lovelorn troubadour, the latter-day Cave is a man who, via his Red Hand Files website, says, "You can ask me anything", and whose most recent shows have brought the same premise into a concert setting. As to why he's done this, the need for connection appears paramount. "We all needed to draw ourselves back to a state of wonder," Cave has said of his family's grief. "My way was to write myself there. The songs on the first half of the album are the children. The songs on the second are their parents. *Ghosteen* is a migrating spirit." Those are understandably the only words Cave has uttered publicly about an album on which the images in the songs are often as fantastical as the album's bucolic-kitsch cover. In *Sun Forest*, children spiral upwards, the steeds of *Bright Horses* burn with intensity, and *Galleon Ships* "circle around the morning sun".

The arrangements, with their use of swirling electronics, recall *Skeleton Tree*. And yet Cave and his trusted lieutenant Warren Ellis aren't repeating themselves. If that album was as stark as the title suggests, there's now an analogue warmth to the synths and loops that recalls Kraftwerk and Berlin-era Bowie, even prog rock. The soaring melodies add to the ornate qualities of the music.

As for the three songs that conclude the album, the parents, these seem most concerned with the darkest moments of grief. On *Ghosteen*, "Baby Bear he has gone". For *Hollywood*, Cave mixes up a road-movie narrative with the story of Kisa Gotami, a woman who went to see the Buddha after losing her child.

It's the last song, but it's tempting to see it as the key to what's gone before, the linking point between the grief and the wonder. With all your heart, you wish circumstances were such that it didn't have to be this way, and yet Cave's dogged insistence on reaching for the wonder is, in itself, utterly wondrous.

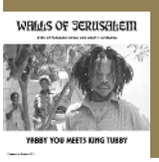
MATTHEW THORNE

From Japanese ambient to funky gospel, from post-punk to electrified jazz-rock, it's been a strong and diverse year for both reissues and compilations

20 Stereolab
MARS AUDIAC QUINTET
DUOPHONIC
Operating in a high-concept, retro-cool world all of their own making, Stereolab's mesmerising third studio album formed part of the first wave of releases of a long-overdue reissue campaign. Lovingly repackaged as a triple, expanded and remastered, *Mars Audiac Quintet* displays the Labs at their joyful space-age pop peak.

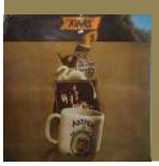
19 Joy Division
UNKNOWN PLEASURES
RHINO
Joy Division's dark debut set the gold standard for post-punk in the late 70s. Poet-frontman Ian Curtis' themes of alienation, and producer Martin Hannet's sonic innovation created a peerless art statement, the perfect artefact of its times. The 40th anniversary edition was issued on ruby red vinyl and was housed in an alternative white sleeve.

18 Yabby You
WALLS OF JERUSALEM
PRESSURE SOUNDS
Finally rescued from the archives, 1976's wonderful *Walls Of Jerusalem* is a long-lost roots classic that brings together two of reggae's giants, namely producer Yabby You and legendary dub master King Tubby. The original album is a sweetly soulful affair, and is keenly augmented by a second set of delay-heavy dub versions.



On The Record
Joy Division
"It was very indirect," says Joy Division's Peter Hook. "A lot of punk albums were very direct. 'It's shit, you're a shit, you're a twat, fuck off, bahhhh!' Yet Joy Division were creating a landscape. It enabled you to dream about what you'd do when you'd got out. Punk was like someone screaming at you to get off a bus: 'Get off you fucking bastard!' And ours was, 'We're going to get off this bus and we're going to go somewhere wonderful'. That's to me what the equivalent of punk against Joy Division was."

17 The Kinks
ARTHUR
BMG
The Kinks' seventh studio album showcases some of Ray Davies' sharpest story-telling songs. A concept album about one man's decision to emigrate from Britain as it enters the common market, this 50th anniversary release remains as pertinent as ever. The 2LP vinyl version contains BBC session cuts and some lost Dave Davies solo cuts.



16 Duster
CAPSULE LOSING CONTACT
NUMERO
The band that once described their music as 'experimental depressive music' resurface with the lavish boxset treatment. The set gathers the two albums (1998's *Stratosphere* and 2000's *Contemporary Movement*) and one EP (1999's *1975*) they released for Up Records and adds the *Transmission, Flux* EP and a handful of rare unreleased tracks.

15 Various Artists
THE TIME FOR PEACE IS NOW
LUAKA BOP
The second instalment of Luaka Bop's World Spirituality Classics series showcases gospel groups from the 1970s. There is deliverance and self-betterment to be had here, for sure, but it comes with a funky beat, deep soul groove and not-so distant echoes of Curtis Mayfield. Worth it for The Staple Singers' version of *We Got A Race To Run* alone.

Don Cherry's outsider spiritual jazz deserves a much wider audience

14 Don Cherry
BROWN RICE
A&M
Freewheeling trumpeter Don Cherry's hypnotic fusion masterpeice skilfully weds Indian, African and Arabic music to Miles Davis' electrified jazz-rock innovations. Released in 1975, this is *Brown Rice*'s first appearance on vinyl for more than four decades, and its outsider spiritual jazz deserves a much wider audience. A thrilling album.

13 Alice Clark
ALICE CLARK
WEWANTSOUNDS
Huge credit and thanks are due to reissue label Wewantsounds for making one of soul's longest lost and most desired classics available again. First released in 1972 on Mainstream Records, Clark's much sought-after self-titled disc has always been something of a Holy Grail for cratediggers. For those content with a reissue, the search is over.

12 Bob Dylan
TRAVELIN' THRU 1967-1969
COLUMBIA/LEGACY
So deep was Dylan's well of talent that we're 15 albums into his incredible Legacy series and no dip in quality is even remotely evident. This fascinating set focuses on previously unavailable recordings made with country legend Johnny Cash and unreleased nuggets from the *John Wesley Harding*, *Nashville Skyline* and *Self Portrait* sessions.

11 Mark Hollis
MARK HOLLIS
UMC
The recently departed Talk Talk man's first and only solo album failed to receive a vinyl release back in 1998, with only a later indifferent German pressing making do for his legion of fans. All of which makes the reissue of this beautiful, low-key and intimately minimalist collection of songs all the more welcome. An affecting listen.

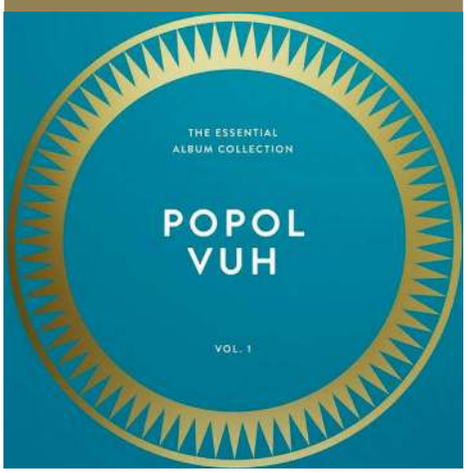
10 The Pop Group
Y
MUTE
The antagonistic Bristolians took post-punk to its logical limits and beyond on their ludicrously seminal debut album. *Y* is a wilfully singular and aggressively radical document of the late 70s that combines discordant funk with skronky free jazz and abrasive dub. The limited edition boxset to mark its 40th anniversary is a thrilling artefact.

9 Tubby Hayes Quartet
GRITS, BEANS AND GREENS
FONTANA JAZZ/DECCA
Tubby Hayes was a well-respected presence on the UK jazz scene in the 60s. Subtitled *The Lost Fontana Studio Sessions 1969*, this never previously issued, 'lost' classic finds the jazzman at the sensational peak of his acrobatic playing powers. Perhaps someone should check down the back of the sofa at the Fontana studios more often.

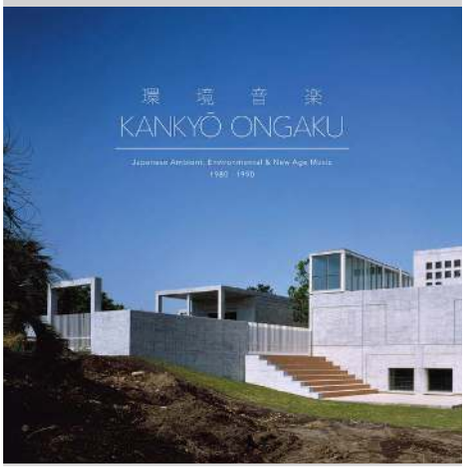
8 A Tribe Called Quest
MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS
JIVE
Hailing from Queens, New York, A Tribe Called Quest are one of hip-hop's most influential groups. *Midnight Marauders* was the band's third album (1993), and wistfully represents the artful innovation and sense of wonder from the golden age before the gangsters took over. A true classic from back in the day, which no home should be without.

On The Record
The Pop Group
"The Pop Group went through five musical phases in three years," says the band's guitarist Gareth Sager. "At one stage we were far closer to what most think of as post-punk. Back then, it was considered commercial, and bands like Joy Division and Echo & The Bunnymen went this direction, and made it pay. I was never interested in being commercial, dumb naiveté on my part, I just wanted something that represented how we were feeling. We did that with *Y*."

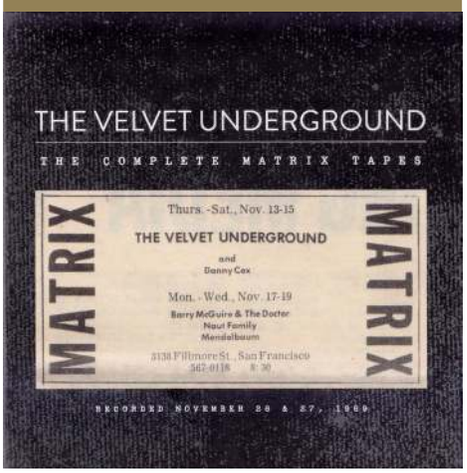
7 Popol Vuh
THE ESSENTIAL ALBUMS
BMG
Under the guruship of visionary keyboardist Florian Fricke, Popol Vuh have held a sway over generations of neo-classical, ambient and electronica artists. This hefty boxset brings together six early albums of mind-expanding meditations, including the joyous world-beat textures of prime work *Einsjäger Und Siebenjäger* and a couple of haunting soundtracks (*Aguirre, Nosferatu*) created for friend of the band, Werner Herzog.



6 Various Artists
KANKYO ONGAKU: JAPANESE AMBIENT, ENVIRONMENTAL & NEW AGE MUSIC 1980-1990
LIGHT IN THE ATTIC
The Seattle label's ability to put together a killer anthology is unparalleled, and with this cohesive collection of ambient-leaning Japanese electronic music the happy knack has been pulled off yet again. While the tracks on this 3LP compilation date back over 30 years, the feel is eerily contemporary.



5 The Velvet Underground
THE MATRIX TAPES
POLYDOR
It's the first time on vinyl for this historic set from 1969 that captures the post-John Cale incarnation of the cult New Yorkers in spectacular form. This is VU V.2, and minus the experimental hissings and white noise, they transform into a sensational live band, with a locked-in groove and edge all of their own. Originally released as a CD-only boxset, you can now own the 43 tracks across no fewer than eight LPs of splendour.

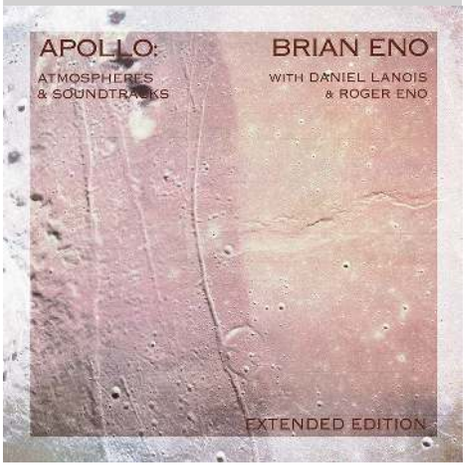


Gene Clark
NO OTHER
4AD

The original Byrd's fourth album was a glorious failure, all but disowned by its record company on release in 1974. Branded by the critics as an exercise in bloated studio excess, it was the final nail in Clark's coffin as a music biz contender. Yet, as is often the way, *No Other* has subsequently undergone a serious critical reappraisal. Mixing sorrowful country with breezy LA rock, the album is now garnering the appreciation it has always deserved. Not only that, but it's the recipient of a super-expansive boxset courtesy of 4AD.

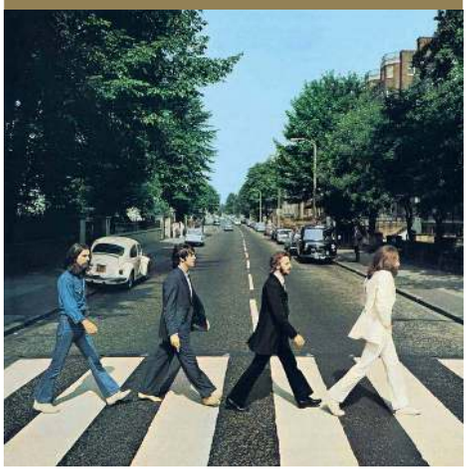
Brian Eno
APOLLO: ATMOSPHERES
RHINO

Reissued to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landings, the prolonged edition of Eno's timeless masterpiece *Apollo: Atmospheres & Soundtracks* not only contains a fully remastered version of the 1983 release, but also contains a further 11 additional, newly composed tracks. These supplementary compositions blend beautifully with the album's originals to seamlessly develop *Apollo*'s expanding universe. A work of gravity-defying genius from the godfather of ambient music.



The Beatles
ABBEY ROAD
APPLE/EMI

In many ways, *Abbey Road* was the perfect album for The Beatles to end their career on. As this excellent reissue ably demonstrates, they were still in their prime, and capable of songwriting exploits other bands could only envy. They were also way ahead of their time in the studio. It's not quite as expansive as *The Beatles* (*The White Album*), but *Abbey Road* is all about concision. The original album has been remixed/remastered expertly by Giles Martin and Sam Okell, and every alternative take offers fresh insight.



Prince
1999
WARNER

What Warner have done with the first true deluxe edition of a Prince album is nothing short of perfection. It's pretty much the platonic ideal of a vinyl boxset. It takes 10 LPs and a Blu-Ray DVD, but here is everything from the CD/streaming edition of *1999* on six hours of vinyl. As Prince's estate manager Michael Howe told *LLV* earlier in the year: "We're big fans of vinyl. It's a more satisfying experience so, when it came to making everything available, we said, 'Great, let's make the vinyl boxset complete'."

Howe's admirable attitude helps make *1999* the year's best reissue. Whereas the *Purple Rain* reissue from 2015 was a frustrating compromise, the 23 demos and alternative takes on *1999* show the rumours of how much brilliant music Prince was making in the 1980s are true. Alongside a more intimate version of *International Lover* and a breathless early run-through of *Purple Rain* rarity *Possessed* are 17 songs Prince never released at all.

You'll get lost in those demos for days on end, and they comprise just four of the 11 discs in this remarkable set. A homecoming Detroit show a month after the album's release is an absolute joy, as you can sense Prince realising he's finally about to become a superstar in a performance that's teasing and playful even by his standards. This goes double for a Christmas gig in Houston on the Blu-Ray, where you can see just how otherworldly Prince's brilliance was in 1982.

If there is a small quibble to be had, it's that the B-sides and remixes discs shouldn't be ordered so strictly chronologically – hopefully, Warner will look to spread the songs out a bit next time.

With Howe having confirmed to *LLV* that similarly thorough expanded Prince albums are on the way, it'll be interesting to see whether or not they'll be released in chronological order. Whatever happens, *1999* is a great album to start with. Not only are there so many wonderful extras, but the original album is a masterpiece and, in hindsight, an odd phenomenon.

Brilliant singles as the title track and *Little Red Corvette* are, how did a 70-minute double album become the one to make Prince stellar? The short answer is because there's something to keep every music fan of 1982 happy. After all, we know *1999* could have been a 6LP studio album and it still wouldn't have been a second too long.

STEVE MASON ABOUT THE LIGHT
RUSTIN MAN DRIFT CODE
PANDA BEAR BUOYS
JAMES YORKSTON THE ROUTE TO THE HARMONIUM
SASAMI SASAMI
STEPHEN MALKMUS GROOVE DENIED
AVEY TARE COWS ON HOURGLASS POND
BETH GIBBONS HENRYK GÓRECKI: SYMPHONY NO. 3
FAT WHITE FAMILY SERFS UP!
CLINIC WHEELTAPPERS AND SHUNTERS
HAYDEN THORPE DIVINER
PETER PERRETT HUMANWORLD
HOT CHIP A BATH FULL OF ECSTASY
NIGHT MOVES CAN YOU REALLY FIND ME
NÉRIJA BLUME
(SANDY) ALEX G HOUSE OF SUGAR
ONE TRUE PAIRING ONE TRUE PAIRING
BLOOD ORANGE ANGEL'S PULSE
RICHARD DAWSON 2020
PATRICK WATSON WAVE
BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY I MADE A PLACE
JAAKKO EINO KALEVI DISSOLUTION
A BIGGER SPLASH
DOMINO 2019
Domino

2019 LONG LIVE VINYL BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Substance abuse, acrimonious break-ups, huge royalty cheques, disastrous gigs, dysfunctional relationships, all rock life is here

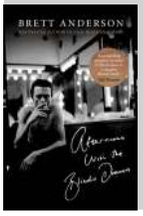
Having made the decision to get the story of your life into a book, you might as well go all in. Half-measures are no good to anybody when it comes to an autobiography, and it's that commitment to honesty that persuaded *Long Live Vinyl* to award its 2019 Book Of The Year title to Wayne Hussey for his self-penned tome, *Salad Daze*. The Mission man is honest, frank and funny throughout the retelling of his version of the truth. Runner-up Mick Houghton is similarly open, and his *Fried & Justified* memoir of his days as a publicist reminds us of the maladjusted nature of most bands, whose careers often resemble a soap opera played out for real. A quick honourable mention must also go out to *Vinyl London*, an essential for any cratediggers needing a fix in the capital.

Afternoons With The Blinds Drawn — 10

BRETT ANDERSON

LITTLE BROWN

Suede's singer follows up his excellent early-days memoir *Coal Black Mornings* with another revelatory dip into his life as a blouse-wearing rock star. This is the book he said he wouldn't write, as it details the sudden rise and gradual fall of the band and his well-being.

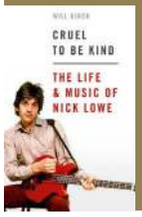


Cruel To Be Kind: The Life & Music Of Nick Lowe — 9

WILL BIRCH

CONSTABLE

If anybody deserves to be the subject of a decent music biography then it's overlooked national treasure, Nick Lowe. Ex-Kursaal Flyer Birch performs the honours with an intimate and insightful chronicle of the former Jesus of Cool.

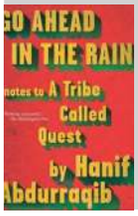


Go Ahead In The Rain — 8

HANIF ABDURRAQIB

MELVILLE HOUSE

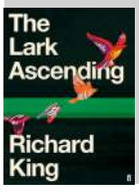
Critically acclaimed poet and critic Hanif Abdurraqib's enduring obsession with Daisy Age hip-hop quartet A Tribe Called Quest affectionately spills out all over the pages of *Go Ahead In The Rain*. Full of sharp insights and piercing cultural context, this is Abdurraqib's love letter to an important band.



7 Vinyl London
TOM GREIG
ACC ART BOOKS
Part handy reference guide, part contemporary social history, Tom Greig's *Vinyl London* perceptively documents the capital's record shop scene. Credit is also due to snapper Sam Mellish, whose photos have that satisfying ability to capture the in-store ambience of individual shops.

6 This Searing Light, The Sun & Everything Else
JON SAVAGE
FABER AND FABER
There have been many books written about Joy Division, but this meticulously curated oral history is the definitive last word. Compiled from in-depth interviews with all the main players, Savage skilfully pieces together the band's story from scruffy schoolboys to post-punk icons.

5 The Lark Ascending
RICHARD KING
FABER AND FABER
Richard King's exploration into the mysterious relationship between music and nature, specifically the British landscape, journeys chronologically from the post-war poets to the acid house scene at the turn of the century. Deftly handled, it makes for a fascinating trip taking in Brian Eno, Kate Bush and Boards Of Canada along the way.



> **When I was writing the book I had it in mind that I was writing it to a friend and not an audience**

4 It Gets Me Home, This Curving Track
IAN PENMAN
FITZCARRALDO EDITIONS
Ian Penman sharpened his journalistic teeth on the *NME* during its late-70s heyday. A Penman piece was always beautifully written, often experimental and guaranteed to carry an intellectual heft. Across eight long-form essays, he returns with his first book for 20 years. He remains a singular treat.

3 Dayglo
CELESTE BELL & ZOE HOWE
OMNIBUS
X-Ray Spex were one of punk's truest pioneers, and in Poly Styrene they possessed the movement's most talented frontwoman. The band proved to be a huge influence on the subsequent Riot Grrrl scene. *Dayglo!*, co-written by Poly's daughter Celeste Bell alongside Zoe Howe, is a fittingly poignant celebration of her mother's life and work.

2 Fried & Justified
MICK HOUGHTON
FABER AND FABER
Publicist Mick Houghton recalls his dealings with his weighty roster of maverick artists. The fact so many of the bands he worked with were dysfunctional (Talking Heads, the Ramones, KLF, Teardrops) was a right royal pain for Mick at the time, but, ultimately, meant his book is rammed full of memorable tales.

1 Salad Daze
WAYNE HUSSEY
OMNIBUS
The Mission man doesn't hold back, as he lifts the lid on his life and times across the pages of his frank and hilarious autobiography. From his initiation in the Liverpool scene of the early 80s through to his booze and drug-heavy stint in Sisters Of Mercy, Hussey is never afraid to tell it like he thought it was.

A word with the winner
Wayne Hussey talks to *Long Live Vinyl*

Did you read any other autobiographies for inspiration?
"I've always read autobiographies. When I was writing this over the course of two years, I read an awful lot of them. Patti Smith's *Just Kids* and Johnny Marr's *Set The Boy Free* were definite favourites. So many people carry a certain amount of cynicism as they get older and I didn't get that with Johnny's."

How did you find the process?
"As much as I've always loved reading, I never felt I had the discipline to write a book. There's a discipline needed to make music, but it's a different kind. I would get up in the morning, put the coffee on and start writing, it would always take me a couple of hours to get into a groove and then words would start working together. One memory would steamroller into another. Once that came, you had to surrender to it, just like you do with music."

How easy was it to dredge up the memories?
"So many things came back to me. In some cases, it was people and episodes that I hadn't thought about for over 50-odd years. In the book, there's a photograph of my school football team from 1968-69. I could name all the players in the team apart from one. Wow! Where does that come from?"

Was there ever the temptation to censor yourself?
"Not really. When I was writing it, I had the thought in mind it was like a long letter to a friend rather than to an audience. People who know The Mission know what kind of person I am – they know I've got a bit of a gob on me. For me to try and be anything other than who I am would be contrived. I always try to take the piss out of myself before somebody else does."

JAMES BACON

2019 LONG LIVE VINYL RECORD SHOP OF THE YEAR

Our second annual Record Shop Of The Year competition saw over 10,000 votes cast, with a new store run by two brothers scooping first prize

Judging by the enthusiastic response to our poll and the upbeat nature of the interviews with our winners, record shops have had a strong 2019. Despite challenging conditions, shops all over the UK are booming. So, if you've ever dreamed of running a record shop, get on the phone to your bank manager. Let's face it, online outlets may stock more LPs, but they're never going to make you a cup of tea while you're browsing. Two of the stores here, Barrow's TNT Records and Bury's Wax And Beans, have been trading for a year or less, and both have managed to establish themselves quickly with the help of fanatical support from the local community. Indeed, with no big-city record shops placed in our final four, it's the focus on community that is the most striking shared characteristic. Bridport's Clocktower Music, for instance, describe themselves as a 'grown-up youth club', while Loafers in Halifax use the phrase "a fantastic community haven". Our advice to record shop owners? Get the kettle on!

The Runners-up

Loafers Vinyl & Coffee

HALIFAX

How has 2019 been for you? "It's been fantastic. We've not only expanded our premises and added a bar and food offering, we were also crowned 'New starter business of the year' for Yorkshire in April. Our customer base has continued to grow, and with the added space, more opportunities have arisen. We're hosting a book event with Tim Burgess and constantly being approached to host live music."

Which records were the biggest sellers for you this year? *"Ghosteen,* Nick Cave; Liam Gallagher, Gerry Cinnamon and Richard Hawley."

What was your favourite album of the year? *"Further* by Richard Hawley, and best reissue is *Monster* by R.E.M."

Why do you think your customers voted for you? "We've built up a fantastic community haven. By visiting Loafers to buy a record, have a coffee/beer or attend one of our events, everyone feels part of something special. We never stand still."

Record stores have to be more than just shops these days. What does that mean for you? "We provide an eclectic mix of great records, source our beer and coffee from local suppliers and have a desire to curate more events, including live music and comedy."

What's next for the shop? Any big plans for 2020? "We're already planning RSD 2020, and looking forward to hosting some great live music."

Clocktower Music

BRIDPORT

How has 2019 been for you? "Clocktower have had a great 2019, with a significant increase in both sales and customer footfall."

Which records were the biggest sellers for you this year? "All the old favourites: The Beatles, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Fleetwood Mac and Frank Sinatra."

What was your favourite album of the year? "Billie Eilish, *When We All Fall Asleep Where Do We Go?* Our favourite reissue was Toots & The Maytals, *Funky Kingston*."

Why do you think your customers voted for you? "The kettle is always on, a friendly, knowledgeable crew always looking to chat, in a vibrant shop with plenty of open space to browse, listen and relax. We are a grown-up youth club."

Record stores have to be more than just shops these days. What does that mean for you? "It's not all about the bottom line, it's enthusiasm and drive to continually make the shop more fun to visit. Add in good facilities, sofas, hot drinks, loos, lots of displays and an atmosphere that attracts the non-vinyl partner, making Clocktower Music a destination. Finally, we do not sell online and we try to ensure our new vinyl is priced below internet prices."

What's next for the shop? Any big plans for 2020? "Two of the crew are getting married after 40 years. We want to increase the number of live events and the diversity of vinyl available."

Wax And Beans

BURY

How has 2019 been for you? "We've only been open since June and the support from the local community has been incredible. We've had visitors from all over the country and tons of positive feedback, as well as support and knowledge sharing from well-established indies. It's been hard work learning the ropes, but well worth it."

Which records were the biggest sellers for you this year? "Talk Talk, *The Colour Of Spring*; Adventures Of Salvador, *Welcome To Our Village*; Fontaines DC, *Dogrel*; Gerry Cinnamon, *Erratic Cinematic*; Idles, *Joy As An Act of Resistance*, and everything Arctic Monkeys."

What was your favourite album of the year? "We love the Fontaines DC album. Fave reissue, *The Colour Of Spring."*

Why do you think your customers voted for you? "We hope we've created a space for music and coffee fans to meet in a friendly environment. We're only a small shop, so people naturally sit together and so many new friendships have been made."

Record stores have to be more than just shops these days. What does that mean for you? "People say we've created a hub where they can meet and enjoy the space. Kids right through to grandparents…"

What's next for the shop? Any big plans for 2020? "We'd love more space so that we can welcome more friends to the shop, and do everything on an even bigger scale – watch this space!"

TNT Records

BARROW-IN-FURNESS

It's been a breathtaking 12 months for the sibling duo behind TNT Records in Barrow. Just a year after opening, they're *Long Live Vinyl*'s Record Shop Of The Year, and they're already talking about expanding…

When brothers Dave and Dan Turner achieved the lifelong dream of opening a record shop in their home town of Barrow last Christmas, they can't have dreamed that three days later they'd have sold every new release in the store. TNT Records' doors opened on 22 December 2018 and by the time the Turners were tucking in to their turkey and sprouts on Christmas Day, they'd shifted some 400 records. A further 12 months later, they're celebrating being named *Long Live Vinyl*'s second Record Shop Of The Year.

Everything happened in fast-forward this time last year for Dave and Dan, both die-hard music fans who'd grown up playing in bands around the Cumbrian town, once they spotted the site on Duke Street. "The shop's on the main strip in Barrow, a nice high-end street with three- and four-storey buildings," says Dave. "We couldn't have imagined a building like this. It was now or never time. We went to see it on 14 December and by the 15th we had the keys and had started work on the custom-built listening room.

"We opened a week later. We had three joiners in working 24-hour shifts, friends and family helping and at one point I stayed up for 48 hours. We opened on 22 December and by Christmas Day the whole of the new section was empty, we'd sold probably 400 new records. We had to rethink the situation and get bigger distributors straightaway.

"We had 5,000 pre-owned records, too. We'd been archiving for six months prior to opening the shop, I had half my dad's house full of records, my brother's house was full of records and then the shop cropped up. It's been insane."

Just minutes into our conversation with the brothers on a crisp November afternoon, as customers steadily come and go, all greeted by their first name and treated like old friends, their enthusiasm is infectious. The reasons why so many of our readers voted for a shop in a town of 50,000 people on the fringes of the Lake District are abundantly clear.

"It's what the town has needed for years," says Dave. "There were a couple of little CD stalls in the

RECORDS

IRON MAIDEN
RED HOT CHILI PEERS

RED HOT CHILI PEERS
LOVE BOAT

> **We've hit the ground running. It's just what the town and the local area needed. There's so much demand for vinyl**

town before, but anything close to a record shop selling vinyl was a three-hour round trip. You'd have to go to Preston or Manchester. Barrow is in the middle of nowhere. We're an hour away from the motorway, a couple of hours from Manchester and Carlisle. So when you open a business like this, people support you and get behind it. That's a good reason why we've established ourselves in such a short time.

"People come in and offer me more money than we're charging. They can get their records with the click of a button online, but they'd rather come in here. I know most of the customers by first name." Right on cue, one of those customers finishes flipping through TNT's racks, waves us goodbye and makes his way towards the door. "Thanks Oliver, cheers mate," says Dave warmly.

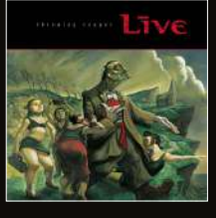
"People come in and leave much happier, they're more than just a transaction to us. It's about having that personal touch, and since day one people have wanted to be a part of TNT Records, and want it to stay around. We're Barrow born and bred, we've been in bands and toured Europe and gained knowledge over time, but for years there's been nowhere in Barrow to buy vinyl. We've been wanting to open a shop like this for over 10 years now, it's been a dream of ours and we're purely driven by our passion. Vinyl never left us from the 80s. We were brought up with vinyl and the passion for music runs through our blood. We bend over backwards for our customers and we're living the dream. The shop's on fire.

"We've hit the ground running and it's just what the town and the local area needed. There's so much demand for vinyl. We're in shock, it's overwhelming."

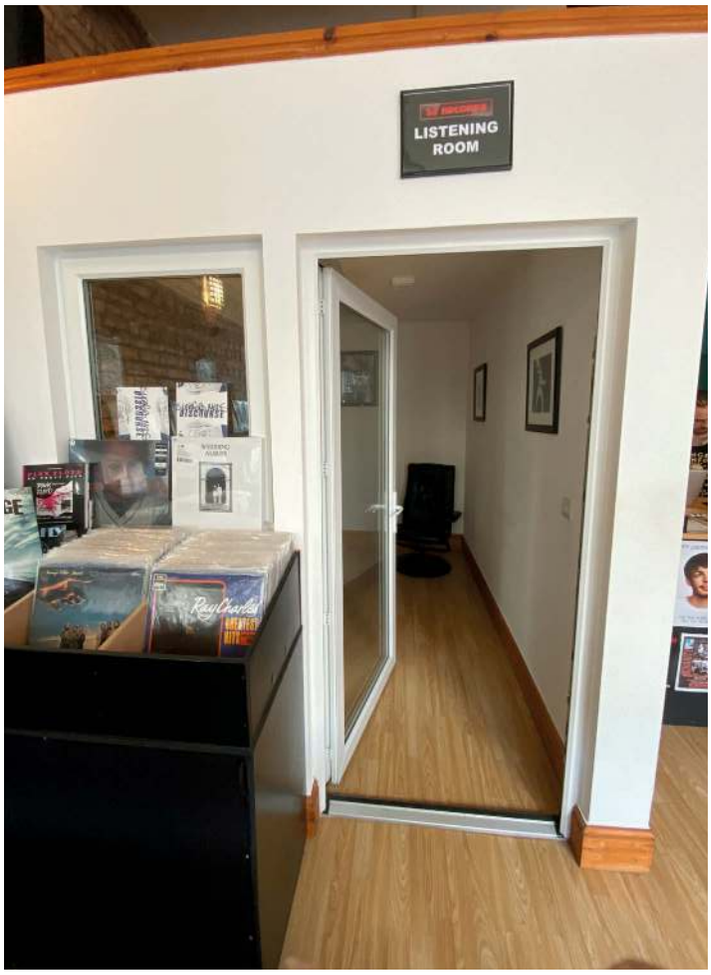
Stepping into TNT from Barrow's main drag, you're confronted by an inviting space with bare-brick walls and a high ceiling, the extensive pre-owned section to the left, and fast-expanding new records area to the right. In the comfortable listening room, equipped with Rega turntables and a selection of headphones and speakers, pictures of

The Turner Prize
Dave and Dan's all-time favourites

DAVE
RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
MOTHER'S MILK
(EMI, 1989)
"It's such a tough question, but I'm going to say *Mother's Milk*. I was brought up with a lot of different music in the early 80s, a lot of Pink Floyd and Dire Straits, but I wanted to develop my own tastes. My brother left a tape of this in his old car when he went to uni and I started playing it. Everything on the album is a hook, and every track takes me back to driving round my mate's farm in cars when I wasn't old enough – my younger years getting into music. This opened my eyes to so much music."



DAN
LIVE
THROWING COPPER
(RADIOACTIVE, 1994)
"This album came out in my teens when I was mainly into grunge. It ticked all the boxes, but was a bit different to anything else I'd heard. It's one of those albums that I can listen to all the way through and not skip a track. Even now, 25 years later, I can listen back and experience those feelings of first hearing it as a teenager. We've sold a few of these on our personal recommendation and the sound is still very current now."



Elvis, Kurt Cobain and Jimi Hendrix look down on you. This is a place built and presided over by two men who live for music and are seizing their opportunity. Dave, who works 12-hour shifts in the shop, says he hasn't had a day off in the 12 months since TNT opened.

"Every sort of genre sells in the shop," he says proudly. "It's anything from jazz to metal, brand new releases… limited editions and coloured items, people are thankful and humble, just like we are. We're northern working-class people.

"The customers are everyone. I've sold pirate metal to a seven-year-old, people coming in with their grandparents, people who don't know anything about vinyl at all, it goes from seven-year-olds up to 85-year-olds wanting Elvis and jazz. We get collectors coming in who're just interested in one artist… it's just brilliant.

"A lot of the collections we've got haven't seen the light of day for 30 or 40 years and we've got loads of first editions in the shop. We don't sell CDs, we don't need to, it's an obsolete format now. Vinyl is the way forward and with our listening room people come in and try records before they buy. We even have people who don't own record players, who have their own box of vinyl in the listening room. They come in every week, put on their records, have a cup of tea and just chill."

Like most good community record shops in small towns, TNT offers more than just a place to buy vinyl. As well as the rehearsal space for local bands, listening room and music lessons, the shop hosts weekly acoustic nights on Fridays, *Vinyl Revival* author Graham Jones was a recent visitor and Oasis and Verve photographer Brian Cannon is booked in for an appearance this month. It's a cherished facility for music lovers, and the brothers already have an eye on expansion as they try to sate the town's thirst for records.

> **I'm just loving it. What else would I be doing if I took a day off? I'd only come down the shop**

"We wanted to open a shop that offered vinyl, band merchandise, turntables, rehearsal space and be a more of a hub," says Dave. "I'm just loving it. To be honest, what else would I be doing if I took a day off? I'd only come down the shop! We want to expand upstairs, we've got a few ideas and different options. We've got three floors of gold here with the practice rooms and listening room, and we're halfway through building a low-cost recording studio, it's amazing. We need more space, we need to expand and go upstairs and there'll be more vinyl up there."

With their inexhaustible energy, it's hard to see how the Turner brothers can fail. TNT is the perfect example of why small communities need record shops – and what a success story those shops can become when they're embraced by the communities they serve.

We'll leave Dan with the final word: "We want to sincerely thank all the customers for their support," he says with a broad smile. "Vinyl is back and it's massive again. The support we have received has been absolutely amazing. We've got a website, but we simply haven't had the time to put any records on it, we're that busy in the shop. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that local community and the support we get. It's been overwhelming."

Gear Of The Year 2019

2019 was the year that hi-fi's big hitters and new boys raised the bar. Here's the cream of the turntable crop, together with a host of desirable amps, phono stages and speakers…

While the rest of the planet seemed to lose its collective mind in 2019, we're pleased to report it was business as usual in the wonderful world of hi-fi engineering. It was impossible to ignore the existing giants of the industry, notably Rega, who consolidated their position as heavyweight champions with notable additions to the range such as the sublime Planar 10.

Elsewhere, other established big hitters such as Cambridge Audio, Monitor Audio and KEF again pushed the envelope, delivering top-level products at attainable price points – the latter continuing its fearless foray into the world of wireless. But it wasn't all about the veterans this year, with AVID HiFi upping the stakes with their range of brilliantly engineered turntables and amps that challenge the status quo – and with the excellent entry-level Ingenium P&P deck, a genuine masterpiece from Conrad Mas and his team that we mere mortals can conceivably afford. True audiophile listening has never been more affordable than today. Other names, too, such as fast-emerging speaker brands Fyne Audio and Q Acoustics demonstrated that the new breed of British hi-fi companies have plenty to offer.

So without further ado, on to the awards. Judging was tough before several sleepless nights and a heated pub debate resulted in the following roll of honour. Consider it your Christmas list to forward to Santa… ●

Turntables UNDER £300

Rega PLANAR 1

£230 www.rega.co.uk

Rega has long dominated the turntable market at higher price points, while Pro-Ject et al have swept up the budget dollar. In 2019, there was only one answer to the question "Where should I spend my money if I want a new deck for less than £250?" The RP1's handsome aesthetics, minimalist plinth and simplified RB101 arm, coupled with a pleasingly straightforward setup left us asking, "How the hell do they make it so cheap?" An emphatic winner.

Fluance RT83

£270 www.fluance.com

The Canadian company wowed us with its upgrade on the already-impressive RT81 this year. It sports a striking walnut veneer, Ortofon 2M Red moving magnet cartridge and mature, refined sonic performance. If you want an alternative to the crowd, look no further.

ALSO TRY Pro-Ject Primary E (£159), Sony PS-HX500 (£219), Audio-Technica LP5 (£249), Audio-Technica LP3 (£169)

Turntables £300–£750

NAD C588

£699 www.nadelectronics.com

You may well know NAD for its famous 3020 amp, but the company is fast developing a reputation for stellar turntables that won't break the bank. The NAD C588 has a meaty MDF plinth, high-quality tonearm and Ortofon 2M Red cartridge contributing to its superb tonal balance and strong but never flabby bass performance. A deck that punches well above its price point.

Rega PLANAR 3

£579 www.rega.co.uk

Pushing the original 1970s design dangerously close to perfection, the Planar 3 is yet another superlative piece of hi-fi engineering. Just about every element of what was already a clear market leader has been tweaked for the better – from the reassuringly stable acrylic laminate plinth to the RB330 tonearm. You can't go wrong with a Rega.

ALSO TRY Rega Planar 2 (£399), TEAC TN-4D (£579), Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon (£599)

Turntables £750–£1,500

AVID HIFI INGENIUM P&P

£1,250 www.avidhifi.com

There is life away from Rega at this price point, and nowhere is that life more vibrant and audiophile-friendly than at AVID Hifi. What a turntable this is, taking the world-class engineering Conrad Mas applied on the top-end Acutus Reference deck and somehow squeezing it into an easy-to-assemble package affordable to the likes of you and I. With fluid, weighty bass, clear detailed treble and supreme musical insight, this is the real deal. A proper audiophile turntable that you won't need to be a Russian oligarch or Premier League footballer to obtain. Go find one.

Scheu CELLO

£1,190 www.eliteaudiouk.com

Three decades of high-end turntable manufacturing were poured into this heavyweight contender that is the German brand's entry-level option. Your money gets you a beautiful glass-like chassis, opaque matt acrylic platter and Rega-derived R250 tonearm. The sum of those parts is a finely crafted deck delivering rhythmic and fluid sound, tuneful bass and deeply impressive vinyl replay.

ALSO TRY Clearaudio Concept (£1,320), EAT B-Sharp (£1,200), Rega Planar 6 (£1,400), Gold Note Valore 425 Plus (£1,250)

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

Turntables £1,500+

VPI PRIME SCOUT

£2,500 www.vpiindustries.com, www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

Harry and Matthew Weisfeld's VPI Industries have been turning out high-end turntables since the 70s, and all of that expertise positively sings from the Prime Scout, the company's 'entry-level' deck. Build quality is typically rock solid, with a JMW 9 unipivot arm, sturdy MDF plinth wrapped in a vinyl skin and a steel plate and Delrin feet. What that means is weighty, well-measured bass, astonishing levels of detail and an overall presentation that's pretty close to musical nirvana.

Rega PLANAR 10

£3,599 www.rega.co.uk

Drawing upon innovations from Rega's money-no-object Naiad and refining the already pretty bloody hard to beat P10 and P8 models, the Planar 10 is designed to extract as much of the intended sound of your records as possible from the grooves and add imperceptible levels of its own vibrations to the picture. It's an exceptionally revealing turntable, akin to listening to the original mastertapes of your favourite music. Buy one and you'll be up all night going through your record collection all over again. Genuinely awe-inspiring.

ALSO TRY Rega Planar 8 (£2,439), VPI Prime Signature (£6,000), Avid Acutus SP (£13,500), VPI HW-40 Anniversary (£15,000)

Amplifiers UNDER £500

Cambridge Audio AXA35

£299 www.cambridgeaudio.com

When our reviews supremo John Pickford got his hands on the AXA35 from this venerable hi-fi brand, he had but one question: "How is it so good for this price?" Excellent sound for the money, stylish build, snappy rhythmic performance, solid musical insight and adjustable bass and treble made this yet another undisputed winner from Cambridge that will no doubt sell bucketloads this Christmas.

ALSO TRY NAD 3020 V2 (£399), Onkyo A-9010 (£229), Cambridge Audio CXA60 (£499)

Amplifiers OVER £500

AVID INTEGRA

£7,000 www.avidhifi.com

AVID's new integrated amplifier debuted at February's Bristol Hi-fi Show, arriving with a price tag around half of the British company's top-end Sigsum model. That audiophile quality is present in abundance in the Integra, lending everything thrown at it a confident transparency – the musical truth, revealing contrast and detail as only the best hi-fi equipment can. Sure, seven grand is a lot of money, but you get a top-class versatile phono stage, line preamp and stereo power amp in one box; even the volume pot is a joy to use. Welcome to the audiophile world.

ALSO TRY AVID HiFi Sigsum (£13,000), Rega Brio (£599), Moon 240i (£2,000), Naim Nait XS 3 (£2,199)

Phono Stages UNDER £500

Moon 110LP V2

£399 www.simaudio.com, www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

Canadian whizzkids Simaudio smashed it with the Moon 110LP. Its smart appearance and compact aluminium chassis hide a comprehensive feature list that allows you to precisely calibrate the amp depending on your chosen cartridge. Sound quality is just as impressive, with reviewer John Pickford, ahem, over the moon with the smooth musical character, detail and wide tonal palette. Excellent value for money.

ALSO TRY Rega Fono MM MK3 (£199); Cambridge Audio Alva Duo (£249)

Floorstanding Speakers UNDER £500

Fyne Audio F302

£399 www.fyneaudio.com

Scottish newcomer to the fiercely competitive speakers market Fyne Audio wasted no time in making an impression, with both the F501s and these mightily impressive floorstanders that'll leave you enough change from £400 for a Curly-Wurly. Handsome enough to grace the most upscale living rooms, they deliver bags of detail, a balanced presentation and an ample bass punch that will have you reaching for that price tag for a second look. Yep, they really are less than £400. Great Scots!

ALSO TRY Dali Zensor 5 (£499)

Phono Stages OVER £500

Bel Canto e.One

£1,250 www.belcantodesign.com

OK, £1,250 is not exactly small change, but Bel Canto's beautiful little phono amp truly delivers audiophile quality at a price point that can just about be described as entry-level. The unit's sleek design oozes quality and audio performance is simply stunning; a wonderfully open sound with no congestion or rounded-off transients. Pair the e.One with a proper turntable and an amp of similar quality and you've got yourself a setup to be proud of. Good things do come in small packages.

ALSO TRY Rega Aria (£859), Chord Electronics Huei (£990)

Floorstanding Speakers OVER £500

Q Acoustics 3050i

£579 www.qacoustics.co.uk

The largest offering in the young British brand's 3000i range, the upgraded 3050is immediately impressed us on arrival at *Long Live Vinyl* towers. The company's proprietary P2P bracing system lends greater cabinet rigidity, low-end is fulsome and deep, and the overall sound is warm and even-handed eschewing the hyped overly-bright character some modern speaker brands opt for, leaving ears tired and results artificial and disappointing. Instead, you'll fall in love with the musical, room-filling performance of the 3050is at any given volume level.

ALSO TRY Spendor A7 (£3,200), Fyne Audio F501 (£1,299), KEF Q550 (£799), Monitor Audio Silver 200 (£999)

Bookshelf Speakers UNDER £500

ELAC DEBUT B5.2

£224 www.elac.com

It can be difficult separating the wheat from the chaff in the highly crowded budget bookshelf realm, but rest assured your money is safe with this second iteration of the Debut B5 from the German speaker veterans. Not a penny of the build budget has been wasted and the well-balanced, unfussy mature sound defies that modest price tag. You're basically losing money by not buying a pair.

ALSO TRY Wharfedale D310 (£129), B&W 607 (£399), Dali Spektor 2 (£199), KEF Q350 (£499), Q Acoustics 3010i (£129)

Wireless Speakers

KEF LSX

£999 www.kef.com

With every addition to KEF's range of speakers, the company's esteemed reputation is further enhanced, and it was no exception when the LSX wireless speakers were unveiled. Borrowing tech smarts from the more expensive LS50Ws and a sister model of the superlative LS50s, the LSX is there for when you need to listen to music without your turntable (gasp). Power amplification is built in to the cabinet, as two Class D amplifiers per speaker deliver 70 watts to each woofer and 30 watts to each tweeter – and a 4.5" Uni-Q driver means there's superb coherence and detail in the sound. The future has never looked so appealing.

ALSO TRY KEF LS50W (£1,999)

Bookshelf Speakers OVER £500

Monitor Audio Studio

£999 www.monitoraudio.com

Monitor Audio have been flying the flag for British audio design for getting on for 50 years and these class-leading compact speakers are entirely worthy of their name. Benefiting from trickle-down tech from the top-end Platinum II range, the result is taught bass, superb rhythmic alacrity, a deep, wide stereo image and a lively detailed performance. The optional stands are rather nice, too.

ALSO TRY KEF LS50 (£799), KEF R3 (£1,299), B&W 606 (£549)

Cartridge

Hana EH

£389 www.airaudio.co.uk

Manufactured by the Japanese Excel Sound Corporation, Hana's range of competitively priced cartridges have shaken up the market since arriving a few years back. We tested the EH, a high-output cartridge with a Synthetic Elliptical Diamond Stylus and the SL, a low-output cartridge with a Nude Diamond Shibata stylus and were blown away. The EH is an audiophile bargain that easily outperforms many more expensive high-output MC cartridges. Track one down, you won't regret it.

ALSO TRY Ortofon 2M Red (£59), Goldring E3 (£79)

Accessory

Chord Company Clearway Cables

VARIOUS PRICES

www.chord.co.uk

Nothing provokes debate and cork sniffing in hi-fi circles like the subject of cables. Chord Company has been doing the business for 35 years, and they don't mess around. The proof is in the listening, of course, and the Clearways deliver. Our reviewer raved about the way music flowed effortlessly with an open, involving presentation, detail and dynamic range that was an immediate upgrade on his existing cables.

MOON

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A match made in heaven

MOON 110LP v2 - Phono preamplifier // VPI Prime Scout turntable

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Classic Album

Madonna

LIKE A PRAYER

Madonna's fourth studio album is an immaculate collection of songs which saw the superstar looking inwards for divine inspiration. Taking in grief, loss, redemption and empowerment, with the celestial *Like A Prayer* she created her own new testament

MADONNA
LIKE A PRAYER

Out of all of her studio albums, *Like A Prayer* is Madonna's most explicit attempt at a major artistic statement

Though Madonna had already established herself as the definitive female pop artist of the 80s with a catalogue of classic hits under her Boy Toy belt, she had found herself at a crossroads in her public and professional life when she entered the studio in 1988 to work on her fourth album. Devastated by the breakdown of her marriage to actor Sean Penn and having recently turned 30, Madonna was feeling increasingly introspective, compelled to confront her feelings about the life-altering events that she had brushed aside for years.

Two years on from *True Blue*, her most successful album to date, and feeling immense pressure to follow it up, she was desperate to shift focus back to her work from the tabloid caricature that she was becoming thanks to her tumultuous union with Penn.

Sean's propensity to lash out at paparazzi photographers had made him public enemy number one in the tabloids and even landed him in jail. Madonna's willingness to stand by her man made her guilty by association and earned the couple the moniker, 'the Poison Penns'.

Meanwhile, her 'scandalous' antics with bisexual comedienne Sandra Bernhard – dressing in matching outfits for an appearance on David Letterman's talk show which implied their relationship was more than platonic – and teaming up with *Dirty Dancing*'s Jennifer Grey and dubbing themselves 'the Snatch Batch' (a take on Sinatra's Rat Pack) to frequent New York's infamous lesbian nightclub, Cubbyhole, only fanned the flames of her tabloid notoriety.

As the press plotted her inevitable downfall and primed the likes of Tiffany, Debbie Gibson and Taylor Dayne for pop supremacy, Madonna began work on her next album. Having spent her hiatus from the spotlight collaborating with playwright David Mamet on her Broadway debut *Speed-The-Plow*, and working with filmmakers Woody Allen and Howard Brookner, she was inspired to make the record much more personal than her previous work, delving deep into her psyche and purging her feelings on subjects such as the breakdown of her marriage, the death of her mother and her strict Catholic upbringing.

"We called it the divorce album," says Pat Leonard, who co-wrote and co-produced the LP with Madonna. "Everything took four times longer to do, as she kept breaking down in the studio. It was a hard time for her."

While Madonna felt she had proved herself musically by co-writing and co-producing her *True Blue* album, she felt she had to prove it hadn't been a fluke and worked again with Leonard, feeling they had developed a genuine rapport. Typically, he worked on musical ideas while Madonna contributed melodies and drew from years of her personal diaries and journals to form the lyrics. The first song they wrote was *Like A Prayer*, followed by *Promise To Try* (which dealt with the death of her mother) and *Oh Father* (Madonna's account of her troubled relationship with her father and authority figures in her life).

Known as the 'Holy Trinity' of the album, they became *Like A Prayer*'s emotional core, informing the direction the record would take, with Madonna's vulnerability perfectly encapsulating the feelings she wanted to convey in the songs. *Till Death Do Us Part*, a chilling account of domestic abuse, made especially uncomfortable listening thanks to the circumstances surrounding the end of her marriage to Sean Penn.

Madonna spoke openly about her lyrical honesty to *SongTalk* magazine: "I didn't try to candycoat anything

FRANK MICELOTTA ARCHIVE/IMAGEDIRECT/GETTY

Matchy-matchy: Madonna appeared on David Letterman with comedienne Sandra Bernhard

or make it more palatable for mass consumption. I wrote what I felt… Because this was what was coming out of me."

As well as the searingly honest lyrics, a huge part of the songs' authenticity came from the conviction in Madonna's vocal delivery. Gone was the much-maligned 'Minnie Mouse on helium' girlish voice of some of her earlier work, replaced by battle-scarred tones, thick with emotion. "A lot of the vocals we kept were the first takes," Madonna said. "They were a lot more spontaneous and emotional, and integral to the music. We had every intention of going back and fixing them, but when we listened to them, we said: 'Why should we? They're fine'.

"I think it's because I didn't have the pressure of knowing it was the final vocal. Strange sounds and imperfections, we kept them all in, because they're emotions, too."

Although it had been cathartic for Madonna to pour her heart into *Like A Prayer*'s darker moments, the album needed some light to ensure it was not too much of a culture shock to Madonna's fanbase. *Cherish* was an unabashed love song which harked back to the *True Blue* sound and *Dear Jessie* was a psychedelic lullaby which joyously celebrated the childhood innocence Madonna was robbed of following the death of her mother when she was just five years old.

Madonna also collaborated with long-term co-writer Stephen Bray for a pair of funk-driven tracks, influenced by their mutual love of Sly & The Family Stone – *Keep It Together* and *Express Yourself*, with *Love Song*, a hook-up with Prince (a remnant from an aborted musical they'd been working on) completing the LP.

The world first heard about *Like A Prayer* in January 1989 when soft drinks giant Pepsi announced they'd signed an unprecedented $5 million deal with Madonna to be their new face and would be debuting her single in an advert in a simultaneous broadcast around the world, as well as sponsoring her next world tour. The company had recently fulfilled a similar arrangement with Michael Jackson, and with the biggest female superstar on the planet signed to them, Pepsi were confident the deal would see them emerge as the victors over Coca-Cola in the 'cola wars', which were at their height at the time.

"I wrote what I felt… because this was what was coming out of me"
MADONNA

VINNIE ZUFFANTE/GETTY

The songs

CORE PERSONNEL

Madonna Vocals
Patrick Leonard Acoustic piano, organ, clavinet, synths
Stephen Bray Synths
Paulinho da Costa Percussion
Jonathan Moffett Drums
Niki Haris Background vocals
Donna De Lory Background vocals

MAIN PRODUCTION CREDITS

Madonna, Patrick Leonard, Stephen Bray, Prince

RECORDED

September 1988 – January 1989, D&D Recording, New York City; Ocean Way Recording, Los Angeles

RELEASED

March 21, 1989

1 Like A Prayer

The first song written and recorded for the album, *Like A Prayer* dictated the direction of the entire record. With the verses stripped back to an almost a cappella production, the uplifting gospel chorus highlighted the song's dual meaning of religious and sexual ecstasy. Although Pat Leonard was initially horrified that Madonna wrote the chorus alluding to fellatio and asked her to change it, she refused, and the song's double entendre went unnoticed due to the controversy generated by the video.

2 Express Yourself

Written and produced by Madonna with former boyfriend and long-time collaborator Stephen Bray, *Express Yourself* is a tribute to the pair's love of Sly & The Family Stone. Bristling with Stone's trademark soul, funk and horns, *Express Yourself* is a rallying anthem of freedom and empowerment, with Madonna using her platform to urge her fans not to settle for second best and to strive to reach their full potential. For its release as a single, Madonna called on producer Shep Pettibone to transform the song into a club anthem with a house makeover. It was that version which she performed at the 1989 MTV Awards, her only live performance of the *Like A Prayer* era, during which she debuted a new dance style called voguing.

3 Love Song

Longtime friends and mutual admirers, Madonna and Prince met up to discuss working on a musical together in 1988. However, the project failed to come to fruition, as Madonna hated Minneapolis and returned to Los Angeles, forcing the pair to finish *Love Song* by sending tapes back and forth between the two cities. The process and time constraints meant that the track didn't turn out as well as either Madonna or Prince had hoped, though Madonna loved the sonic combination of synthesised drums, sparse instrumentation and sensual vocals so much she'd deploy them to superb effect the following year on 1990's *Justify My Love*.

The songs
CONTINUED

4 Till Death Do Us Part
On the surface, *Till Death Do Us Part* is one of *Like A Prayer*'s most upbeat moments, but it is in fact one of the album's darkest and most haunting tracks due to its visceral depiction of the breakdown of Madonna's marriage to Sean Penn. With lyrics such as: "The bruises they will fade away/ You hit so hard with the things you say/ I will not stay to watch your hate as it grows" and "When you laugh it cuts me just like a knife", the song appears to confirm tabloid stories at the time of the turbulent marriage of 'the Poison Penns'.

5 Promise To Try
Stripped back to a simple piano track and emotive vocal teeming with vulnerability, *Promise To Try* is a heartbreaking ballad which finds Madonna attempting to make sense of her mother's death. Having recently turned 30, the age her mother was when she died, the song's emotional outpouring took on particular resonance. In one of the most poignant scenes of 1991's *In Bed With Madonna/Truth Or Dare* documentary, *Promise To Try* plays while Madonna visits her mother's grave.

6 Cherish
Included on the album as a safety net in case Madonna's audience didn't take to her arresting new sound, *Cherish* recalled the giddy romanticism of the *True Blue* era. A playful, unabashed love song, it returns to the early days of Madonna and Penn's relationship with its proclamations of undying love, a sentiment which comes across as slightly unsettling after that relationship's eventuality is laid out in such searing honesty on the earlier *Till Death Do Us Part*.

7 Dear Jessie
Inspired by The Beatles' *Dear Prudence*, Madonna decided to write a song for Pat Leonard's baby daughter Jessie, celebrating childlike innocence, imagination and belief in magic. With lyrics celebrating a land of make-believe with pink elephants, magic lanterns, rainbows and mermaids, the song possesses a lullaby-like quality. When Pat Leonard posted an instrumental clip of the original demo on Instagram recently, it revealed a song similar in sound to *Papa Don't Preach* with its hard drums and strings. The eventual psychedelic sound of the final version of *Dear Jessie* was achieved by simply removing the drums, which transformed it completely. The song was released as the album's fourth UK single with an animated video in December 1989.

"The information is on the label. If they don't read it, that's not my problem"
MADONNA

Described by Madonna as the "ultimate meeting of art and commerce," she didn't want to feel used by Pepsi and inked the deal subject to a set of her own stringent ground rules.

She didn't want to dance in the advert (although she relented after meeting choreographer Vincent Paterson) and, as other artists had done, she categorically refused to allow *Like A Prayer* to be amended in any way to incorporate Pepsi into the lyrics, feeling it would cheapen her song.

Entitled *Make A Wish*, the two-minute advert was a sentimental depiction of Madonna watching home movies of her eighth birthday party, and was screened around the world on 2 March 1989 to an estimated audience of 250 million. Thrilled with the response, Pepsi put an edited ad into heavy rotation across the world, delighted with their new signing.

Although Madonna and Pepsi's venture was commended as perfectly executed by business analysts, the success was to be short-lived. The following day, Madonna released her own video for *Like A Prayer*, with cataclysmic results.

The video, with its vivid scenes of stigmata, Madonna kissing a black Saint (often misconceived as being a 'black Jesus') and dancing in a field of burning crosses provoked a response more extreme than anyone could ever have imagined.

Religious groups were up in arms, burning effigies of Madonna and threatening a boycott of her and anyone associated with her. Madonna was typically defiant in her response, claiming the video's positive message had been overlooked. Frustrated that their plight was falling on deaf ears, the protestors turned their attentions to Pepsi, threatening to boycott them and all of their associated companies.

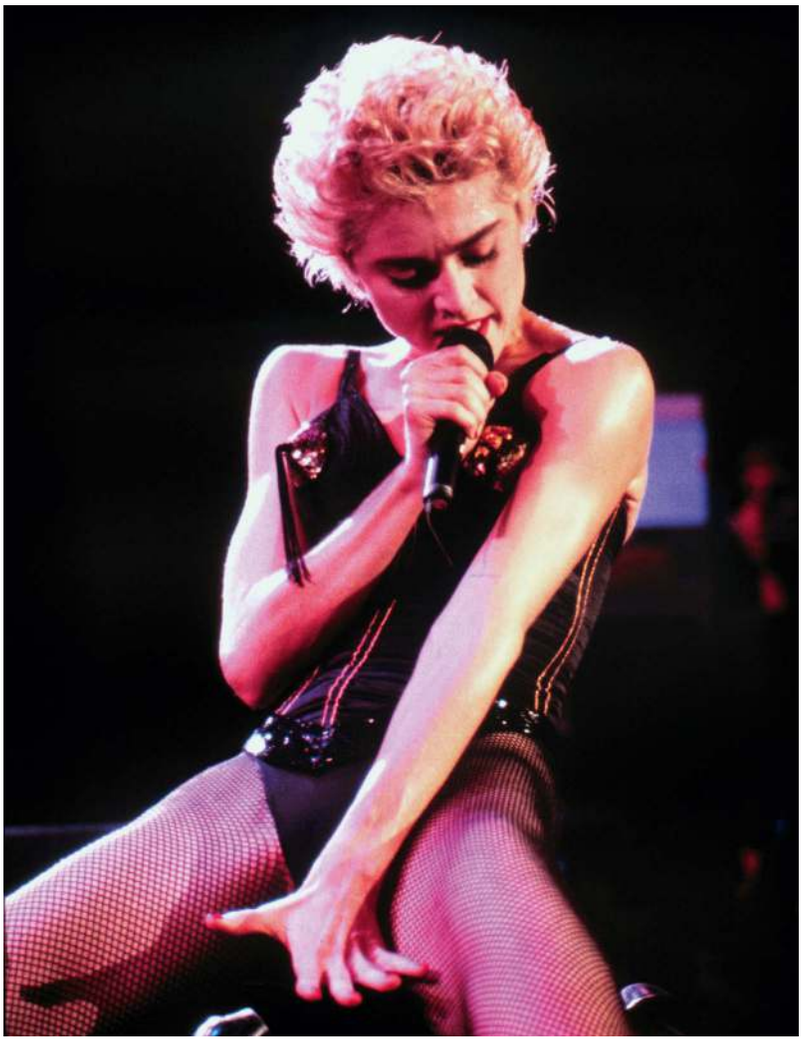
Pepsi buckled under the pressure and ended the deal, allowing Madonna to keep her $5 million fee.

In what turned out to be an indispensable lesson for Madonna – that of teaching her the value of controversy as currency,

Four Play
Madonna fans can hope for a reissue of *Like A Prayer* in 2020. Last month, Rhino reissued Madge's first four albums, three studio and one soundtrack, on crystal clear vinyl, with more of her catalogue rumoured to be in the pipeline.

Madonna, *Like A Virgin*, *True Blue* and *Who's That Girl: The Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* are available individually or as a bundle of four.

Madonna's self-titled 1983 debut sold over 10 million copies worldwide, while the following year's *Like A Virgin*, produced by Nile Rodgers sold 21 million copies. Released in 1986, *True Blue* was a No.1 in 29 countries, shifting 25 million copies.



Madonna described *Like A Prayer* as a collection of songs "about my mother, my father and bonds with my family"

both the single and album topped the charts around the world when they were released in March 1989. As well as the album's commercial success (it went on to sell over 15 million copies and produced a further five hit singles), it was subject to unanimous critical acclaim – a first for Madonna. *NME* gave the album 10/10, while *Rolling Stone* described it as being "as close to art as pop music gets".

Nobody was as surprised by the reception as Madonna herself. "People don't realise I was a songwriter as well as a slut?" she joked. "I guess the image gets in the way. What am I supposed to do? The information is on the label. If they don't read it, that's not my problem. I'm not going to put a sticker on the front of the record saying: 'Listen, I wrote these songs!' People will pay attention to what they want to pay attention to."

After *Like A Prayer*'s delivery amidst a blaze of publicity and controversy, Madonna more-or-less disappeared from public view. Having made the difficult decision to postpone plans to tour *Like A Prayer* that summer so that she could play femme fatale Breathless Mahoney in *Dick Tracy*, pop's most controversial star spent much of 1989 ensconced in the unlikeliest of locations – the Disney studios.

With Madonna unavailable to promote the album, the success of *Like A Prayer*'s subsequent singles was reliant on a string of groundbreaking videos from directors Mary Lambert, David Fincher and Herb Ritts.

The care and effort Madonna expended when visually presenting her work was suitably rewarded at that year's MTV Video Music Awards, where she made her only public appearance of the era to perform *Express Yourself* and pick up a string of gongs, including Artist Of The Decade and the Viewer's Choice Award for *Like A Prayer*.

Ironically, the latter was sponsored by Pepsi, whom Madonna thanked in her acceptance speech "for causing so much controversy".

Although the controversy is one of the more memorable aspects of the era, *Like A Prayer*'s real strength lies in the music itself. By revealing her vulnerability and her strength in a pure, brutally honest way, she had created a body of work that would shape her artistry from this point of her career onwards. ●

The songs
CONTINUED

8 Oh Father
Inspired by Simon & Garfunkel, *Oh Father* was described by Madonna as her way of "dealing with the authority figures in my life". Though the song was released as the fourth single from the album in the US, it wasn't released as a single in the UK until 1996, when it was used to promote Madonna's ballads compilation *Something To Remember*. Pat Leonard recently said that *Oh Father* is the best song he ever worked on with Madonna.

9 Keep It Together
A second collaboration with Stephen Bray, *Keep It Together* is about remaining true to your roots and the importance of family. As with *Express Yourself*, *Keep It Together* was influenced by Madonna's love of Sly & The Family Stone. Drawing on both the funkiness and the sentiment of Stone's *Family Affair*, Madonna fused the two songs together for her show-stopping performance as the encore to the Blond Ambition World Tour.

10 Spanish Eyes
After *La Isla Bonita* and *Who's That Girl*, *Spanish Eyes* took the Latin theme to a darker place. "Like most of *Like A Prayer*, it was written in a day," Pat recalls. "I wrote this at the piano and at the top of the page, it says 'tango'. She [arrived] in the morning, listened to it, wrote the lyric, put a guide vocal down, and went home. What I always believed was good about our collaborations is that the spirit of the composition was always very closely reflected in the sentiment of the lyric, and the spirit of it as well."

11 Act Of Contrition
As the *Like A Prayer* instrumental track plays in reverse, Prince plays screaming freestyle guitar licks while Madonna recites a Catholic prayer for the album's bizarre closer. In 2012, Madonna recited the same prayer as the opening of her MDNA Tour.

JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

Big City Bohemians

THE ELEKTRA RECORDS STORY

From the coffee houses of Greenwich Village to the psychedelic explosion on Sunset Strip and back over to the proto-punks of late-60s Detroit, Elektra was the constantly evolving fable label of American bohemia. On the eve of its 70th birthday year, **Gareth Murphy** talks to founder Jac Holzman and finds out what kept Elektra at the cutting edge

Never heard of a "musician's musician"? Often used to describe the likes of Townes Van Zandt, Ben Harper, Gene Clark and others, it's the notion that working musicians tend to study, not so much the stars, but a higher breed of greed-resistant crusader making music for music's sake. Well, a similar distinction exists among music business players. If you ask all the great label founders of the 70s and 80s for their guiding reference, the first name you'll hear is Elektra – the original big city bohemian.

So how did a popular heroine of Greek tragedy get to be re-spelled with a curious k? Elektra's founder, Jac Holzman, jokes that it was the missing k his parents forgot to include in the name Jac. The story begins in 1950 when Holzman, a lofty 19-year-old 6ft 3in sound enthusiast, opened a Greenwich Village record store called the Record Loft. Although it was a cramped shoe-box operation, he proudly compiled a wide stock of folk and traditional music while tinkering away on his Elektra experiments from the back office.

Right place, right time: Greenwich Village in the 50s was a bustling downtown hive of coffee houses, bistros, clubs, book stores and 24-hour music supported by a local community of bohemian residents. On Saturdays, Washington Square Park drew thousands of buskers, beatniks, poets, students and oddballs from all over New York. There were already a handful of dominant indies, notably Folkways and Keynote, who'd been documenting American folk and blues since the 40s. Jac Holzman, however, being a younger newcomer, was quick to recognise a growing interest in world music.

In 1954, he shut his money-losing store and moved Elektra into a proper office on Bleecker Street, the Village's main thoroughfare of folk clubs. Specialising in 10" albums from singers such as Jean Ritchie, Sonny Terry and Josh White, he also produced albums with exotic themes: Bulgarian chants, festival recordings from Haiti, steel drums from Trinidad, Gold Coast percussionists, Turkish and Russian folk, even sound effects and audio lessons on Morse code. Curating his catalogue almost like a book publisher, maximum attention was given to substance, sound definition, artwork, liner notes and detail.

Thanks to this perfectionism, by the late 50s Elektra was selling thousands of records from an Israeli balladeer named Theo Bikel. Other niche hits came from flamenco guitarist Sabicas and American singer-songwriters Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton.

But by all accounts, Elektra's transformation revolved around folk diva Judy Collins (the inspiration behind Crosby Stills & Nash's *Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*). A folk icon but not a songwriter herself, the beautiful and articulate Collins rallied the label's collective talents around her ambitious productions.

With Holzman's apartment nearby, his vast and esoteric record collection became an A&R annex. In-house producer Mark Abramson sought unusual-sounding instruments from around the world. Josh Rifkin, who ran Elektra's classical sub-label Nonesuch, provided the beautiful arrangements. Collins herself tracked down obscure writers such as Leonard Cohen, whose songs she was first to record and champion.

Another vital recruit to this round table was producer Paul Rothchild. "Paul came from the Boston area," explains Holzman. "He had broad and deep music smarts, smoked dope, and was exactly the right guy at the right time. He carried himself well, the Borsalino hat, the leather coat. He was the perfect choice to attract artists, he was one of them."

In early 1965, it was Rothchild who developed Elektra's first rock album, *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band*. It was also Paul

Rothchild who was the soundman at Newport later that milestone summer when Paul Butterfield added the blistering fuzz to Bob Dylan's electric rendition of *Maggie's Farm*.

Taking photos of the pivotal moment from the front row, Holzman remembers how "the hair on the back of my neck stood up and it was real clear to me you had to go here. That was the point at which I got it as religion. His lyrics were so mature, you can think and you can boogie at the same time." But the show was suddenly stopped by furious organisers. As fist fights erupted backstage, Rothchild took Holzman aside and predicted, "It's the end of one era and the beginning of another!"

Just weeks later, Elektra's plans to dive into folk-rock were interrupted by a bizarre drug raid at the Rothchild home in New Jersey. Probably a set-up by folk enemies, a man-sized box of grass was delivered to Paul Rothchild as cops encircled the house. They later arrested Rothchild at Elektra. Holzman, however, stood by his disgraced producer through trial and imprisonment. "The thing I remember about Jac is his incredible compassion," recalled Rothchild's wife. Throughout the producer's nine-month jail sentence, Holzman continued paying his salary.

Folk singer Judy Collins was an important early signing; she stayed associated with the label for a further 35 years

THE WEST IS BEST

On his own, and feeling that New York's music scene had become claustrophobic, Holzman ventured west. After weeks of false leads and lonely taxi rides, Holzman's first discovery happened in December 1965 at a Sunset Strip club called Bido Lito's, a converted red-brick warehouse down an alleyway. Already struck by how Los Angeles gigs were more racially integrated than in New York, Holzman, accompanied by his wife Nina, looked around at all the "silken-clad girls with ironed blonde hair moving the kind of shapes you didn't see in New York." He'd come to scope out a band called Love, but when "Arthur Lee got up," remembered Nina Holzman, "he had these boots with the tongues hanging out, no laces, and his eye glasses had one blue lens and one red, and a funny shape. He was the most bizarre person I'd ever seen in my life, by far."

Having briefly worked as a roadie for The Byrds, Love's frontman was mixing up his own improbable cocktail of R&B screaming and jarring chords. "When there's an element of danger, when you don't know what a band is going to do next, that attracts me," says Holzman, who immediately signed Love to a three-year deal for a $5,000 advance. The next afternoon, the drug-crazed Arthur Lee blew the cash on a flashy convertible, careful to give his bandmates $100 each.

Released in March 1966, Love's debut album became a local phenomenon among early acid droppers. In May 1966, Holzman flew in from New York to see Love perform at the Whisky A Go Go. He was picked up at the airport by the club's booker, Ronnie Haran, the woman who had just noticed Jim Morrison at a nearby dive. Both she and Arthur Lee urged Holzman to stay behind after the main show to see Morrison's band perform the late slot. Despite feeling jet-lagged, Holzman politely agreed.

But when The Doors came on, their spooky soundscape felt uncomfortably out of sync with the flowery optimism of California. "Jim generated an enormous tension," says Holzman. "Like a black hole, sucking the energy of the room into himself." Turned off but strangely fascinated, Holzman returned three nights in a row. "Then I got it. And when I heard, really heard, Manzarek's baroque organ line under *Light My Fire*, I was ready to sign them."

The band's 18-year-old guitarist knew Holzman was the perfect fit. "I was almost an exclusive Elektra listener when I was in high school," says Robby Krieger, who'd studied the records of flamenco guitarist Sabicas and other Elektra classics by hillbilly bluesmen Koerner, Ray & Glover. Ray Manzarek, the eldest of the band, instantly warmed to Jac Holzman's intellectual manner, later joking that Holzman was the first person he'd met in the music business who spoke in full sentences.

"They liked me," recalled Holzman, who was able to engage Morrison and Manzarek with all their musical, literary and cinematic references. They sat around a table, and without a manager, translated ideas into

Crazed psych/folk rockers Love were Holzman's first West Coast signing

"When there's an element of danger, when you don't know what a band is going to do next, that attracts me"

L GOULD/IMAGES/GETTY GILLES PETARD/REDFERNS/GETTY

The Doors were initially signed to Columbia; after being released, they were signed to Elektra by Holzman

a tailor-made three-album plan. "We loved Orson Welles and the music of Howlin' Wolf, in other words darkness," said Manzarek. "Or Muddy Waters singing *Hoochie Coochie Man*. Or listening to Miles Davis' music, with its dark overtones. Music that had a deep psychological poetry. That's where The Doors come from: *City Of Night*, Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles, Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day Of The Locust*."

FUTURE CLASSICS

As for the issue of producer, when Holzman suggested Paul Rothchild, Robby Krieger's eyes again lit up. Having seen the name on most of his favourite records, "Man, that's perfect!" he told his bandmates.

Unfortunately, it required some arm twisting. Not only did Rothchild wince on first listen, Holzman had to beg a parole officer. But the tough Bostonian got The Doors practising hard for two weeks solid before any recording began. "We nailed the sound on the first day," said engineer Bruce Botnick. "And after that, no one touched a knob, an amplifier, or a microphone. It was all recorded live. Even tape delays on the voice were done in the moment."

The sessions were packed with future classics such as *Light My Fire*, *The Crystal Ship*, *End Of The Night* and *Break On Through*, but it was the album's 10-minute finale that earned the producer's respect. "We were in the middle of recording *The End*, a landmark composition," explained Rothchild. "I got chills top to bottom. And at the end of the take, I was drained as anyone out in the room from the experience." Jim Morrison had dropped LSD for the recording, and when Rothchild called a break, Morrison wandered down the street to a church.

Staring at a statue of the Virgin Mary, he got so worked up about the song's deep meanings that his second take was an explosive performance of the latter section, where "the killer awoke before dawn, he put his boots on". Rothchild spliced the silky beginning of the first take with the apocalyptic thunder of the second to create the final cut. "And at that moment," said Rothchild, "I knew the band was going to be famous."

It took almost a year. Not wanting The Doors to get drowned in the pre-Christmas noise, nor appear on glitzy TV shows, Jac Holzman convinced the band to wait a tortuous four months until January 1967, a more favourable time to launch such a dark, unknown entity. To create a stir in the right circles, Holzman brought The Doors to New York all autumn and got them gigging in Andy Warhol's Factory. He hired photographers to shoot the stark artwork. For TV, Holzman filmed a black and white video for *Break On Through*.

"By the spring of 1967, The Doors were smoking, and by Monterey, the label was on fire"

Upon release, Holzman took out dark widescreen billboards around Los Angeles to emphasise The Doors as cinematic music. With momentum growing throughout spring, Paul Rothchild then edited a three-minute version of *Light My Fire* for AM radio, which gradually picked up airplay all over the country. The rest is history.

WINTER OF LOVE

During the same eventful winter, Love released their second album, *Da Capo*, a commercially modest but exciting psychedelic hit, produced by Holzman himself. New to Elektra, there was also The Incredible String Band, an eccentric troupe of Scottish folksters. Another important find in this period was a 19-year-old singer-songwriter named Tim Buckley (father of Jeff), whose second album, *Goodbye And Hello*, grew into a cult classic in the summer of 1967.

Curiously, neither The Doors nor Love were invited to play at Monterey, but Elektra began reaping the rewards of the world's gaze suddenly turning west. "By the spring of 1967," recalled Jac Holzman, "The Doors were smoking, and by Monterey, the label was on fire. LA was the place."

With Californian psychedelia capturing the imagination, *Light My Fire* topped the charts, almost a year after being recorded. "Everything just exploded," said Ray Manzarek. "In mid-July 1967, The Doors were the number one band in America."

That same summer, Love wrote and recorded their enduring masterpiece, *Forever Changes*. Fraught with fights and drug psychosis, the ambitious project was methodically layered piece by piece at a time when Arthur Lee was spending nights in Bela Lugosi's mansion, dropping acid and dabbling in heroin. Released in November to mixed reactions, *Forever Changes* was given its warmest reception in England – hailed for its sumptuous string orchestrations that had in fact been written separately over three weeks with Albert Lee singing ideas for arranger David Angel.

At exactly the same time, The Doors were working on *Strange Days*, a deeper exploration of their own dark sound. Released in September 1967, it too was praised by discerning critics as a sonic maturing, but was commercially drowned by the debut album hanging in the charts for a year.

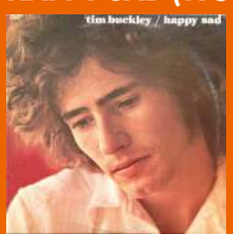
MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Elektra Essentials

LOVE
FOREVER CHANGES (1967)

The difficult third album, this is undoubtedly the masterpiece of California's most under-praised group. More acoustic than their noisier debut, *Forever Changes* was painstakingly layered over a long summer of intermittent and often fractious brainstorming. A whole three weeks were given to the string orchestrations alone, with Arthur Lee singing ideas to arranger David Angel. Driven softly by steely guitar arpeggios, it's a subtly modulating storyboard that continually opens up into moments of sheer brilliance. With jolting chord changes and weird lyrical images, Arthur Lee's madness is never far below the otherwise sleek, spacious surface, creating a fascinating mix of danger and elegance. The hit single was the Mexican-styled opening tune, *Alone Again Or.* But it's the moodier cuts that have earned this milestone album such a classic aura. *The Red Telephone* is one of the high points of the psychedelic 60s. The anthemic, life-affirming melody of the closing tune, *You Set The Scene,* is what Arthur Lee later described as "a future classic". He may well be right. At 52 years old, *Forever Changes* is still growing in cult stature.

TIM BUCKLEY
HAPPY SAD (1969)



The aptly titled *Happy Sad* is the place to dip into one of the late 60s' most unsung heroes. Originally from Washington DC, poet and heart-throb Tim Buckley was one hell of a singer. His vocal style never stopped changing, partly the reason commercial success eluded him. But he's at his finest and most entrancing here, in late 1968, one of the first Elektra artists to record in the brand new Los Angeles studio. From its glorious seven-minute opening, *Strange Feelin',* there's an air of the *Astral Weeks* about this spiritualised brand of jazzy, soulful folk-not-folk. Surrounded by an ethereal coat of acoustic guitar, contrabass, vibraphones and other sparse instrumentation, stirring high points include the six-minute *Buzzin' Fly* and the 12-minute *Gypsy Woman.* A rainy Sunday album of compelling dreaminess, whatever aching genius must have haunted the Buckley dynasty, you can hear it warbling and wailing between these grooves. *Happy Sad* sums up everything his son Jeff replicated 25 years later, right down to his tragically early death.

THE DOORS
STRANGE DAYS (1967)

Which Doors album do you choose? For its live freshness, the eponymous debut is certainly a contender, but for sound and vibe, the follow-up *Strange Days* is where the six-album trip reaches its gooiest and most otherworldly peak. Recorded in the summer of 1967, while their first body of recordings was reaching smash hit status, *Strange Days* documents The Doors progressing sonically from hungry unknowns into America's hottest and most subversive band. Fearlessly dark, yet beautifully textured, it's the self-confident unified atmosphere that makes this a truly great record from beginning to end without any loss of intensity. There's an ample spattering of upbeat foot-tapping hits: *People Are Strange, Love Me Two Times* and *Moonlight Drive,* but it's the quality of the deeper, more mysterious cuts such as *You're Lost Little Girl, I Can't See Your Face In My Mind, Horse Latitudes, Unhappy Girl* and the title track, that make *Strange Days* such a rare and perfectly rounded collection of dark pearls.

NICO
THE MARBLE INDEX (1968)

Literally, acid on heroin. Definitely not for the faint hearted, Nico's masterpiece is possibly the weirdest album of the entire late 60s. Arranger and fellow ex-Velvet John Cale later claimed that Nico's harmonium was neither in tune with concert pitch, nor was it even in tune with itself. Forced to throw the concept of harmony to the icy Baltic winds, he conjured up his own contemporary soundscapes around Nico's bleak Germanic banshee folk. The combination is a split screen of terrifying discomfort. It's not all dissonance, however; tracks such as *No One Is There* are charming examples of Cale's skilful string arrangements. But the album's high point, *Frozen Warnings,* opens into an almost disconcerting vision of the post-punk future. An amazing feat for 1968. Despite shooting heroin with Nico throughout the project, producer Frazier Mohawk honed the final cut down to 37 minutes, later claiming it was the maximum he could take without feeling suicidal. And yet for all its harmonic psychosis, this album is truly possessed by something special.

THE STOOGES
THE STOOGES (1969)

Filthy, gyrating and oozing attitude, this is American punk rock at its most dangerous and thrilling. On release, the opening track, *1969,* proved to be a funky head-turner that earned a modest run of college-radio airplay. Over the last 50 years, however, it's the superlative *I Wanna Be Your Dog* that's grown into the absolute unparalleled masterpiece of both The Stooges' and Iggy Pop's careers. Home also to *No Fun* and the powerful, almost krautrock, *We Will Fall,* there's not much filler on this 34-minute atomic bomb from the suburbs of Detroit. The joke is, all The Stooges originally delivered was five songs. The label demanded they record a few more to justify the album price. So, in two days, they wrote and recorded *Little Doll, Real Cool Time* and *Not Right.* Also rejected was an original lo-fi mix by John Cale. Remixed by Holzman and the band, the final cut was mostly criticised by reviewers in 1969 as being excessively dumb and trashy. Needless to say, it became a template for almost every glam and punk rocker that followed. If you don't already have a copy of this album, go out and buy it immediately. Holy Grail vinyl.

MC5 and The Stooges pose for a photo with friends as they sign contracts with Elektra. Jac Holzman is far left standing next to Danny Fields

Almost every Elektra release seemed to be one year ahead of mainstream tastes. Still, money was gushing in all directions. "I remember the day in 1967," said Paul Rothchild, "Jac walked up to me in the hall and said, 'Paul, this is the first year we're going to break five million gross'. There were about 14 or 15 of us on the payroll. And then all hell broke loose. The company got huge. Jac was running a corporation."

"It's how you spend your money that's important," says the philanthropic boss. Redistributing profits back into a wide palette of artistic follies, Holzman built a state-of-the-art recording facility on La Cienega, in his own words, "the accomplishment of a dream".

DUMB BLONDE

Operational by mid 1968, the studio was augmented by a proper Los Angeles office handling local publicity and A&R. Elektra's expansion West was matched by A&R changes in the New York HQ, notably the hiring of a magnetic young character named Danny Fields. Already a close friend of The Velvet Underground, it was Fields who persuaded Holzman to finance an experiment with Nico and John Cale.

Fed up with her somewhat unfair dumb blonde persona, Nico was writing songs, having been mentored by Jim Morrison during payote expeditions into the Californian desert. With Cale adding his trademark avant garde arrangements to Nico singing over harmonium drones, *The Marble Index* was the end result, a cult flop, revered years later as the precursor to goth.

"Jac walked up to me and said, 'We're going to break five million gross'. All hell broke loose"

It was also Danny Fields who, in late 1968, unearthed two seminal groups in the suburbs of Detroit. The first were MC5, a politically charged gang of hard rockers who pointed Fields to another local group, The Stooges, featuring a 22-year-old Iggy Pop. In 1969, Elektra released *Kick Out The Jams* and *The Stooges*, both modest sellers which grew over time into genre-breaking milestones of pre-punk history.

The problem was that so many artists were burning their eyes in the sun. Arthur Lee, Tim Buckley and Nico were slipping into heroin addiction. Iggy Pop was cutting himself up mercilessly in masochistic performances. MC5 were shitting on stage, stealing equipment and intimidating staff.

Jim Morrison became such a pitiful alcoholic throughout 1969, he pissed his pants during a *Soft Parade* session and was found numerous times crashed out unconscious in the bushes beside Elektra's LA office. Holzman had to hire a suitable babysitter, one of Dylan's best friends, Bob Neuwirth, to cajole Morrison back into writing songs.

And yet, record sales kept growing. These ever-mounting stakes explain why in 1970, after 20 years ducking and diving as an indie, Jac Holzman decided to join Atlantic and Warner in a game-changing project to create a sleek new distribution system – WEA, a type of major-league alliance of America's three hottest indies. Sensing it was time to cash out, he sold his shares to Warner for $10 million, but stayed on for another three years as Elektra's well-paid boss.

When Jim Morrison passed away in Paris in 1971, Elektra had already embraced the oncoming decade of drivetime Americana. From her third album, Carly Simon scored a planetary blockbuster in 1972 with *You're So Vain*, a number 1 in America, Canada and Australia.

But by 1973, feeling jaded and out of place in the new WEA empire, Jac Holzman negotiated a career move to a Warner subsidiary that designed film cameras. Elektra was duly handed over to Warner's youngest mogul, David Geffen.

Although the prestigious imprint has been continued to this day, Elektra will always be synonymous with Jac Holzman's golden age in the late 60s, applying Greenwich Village ideas of integrity and culture to the emerging age of rock. The product speaks for itself: Elektra was probably the hippest label of pop music's most eventful decade.

For such a small and unpretentious operation to be so ahead of trends and spawn so many new genres, it all comes back to the boss's editorial spirit to keep discovering new things and gently help without negative interference, exceptional artists to fulfil their own dreams. ●

LENI SINCLAIR/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY

DIGGING FOR VICTORY

Our intrepid record dealer **Mark O'Shaughnessy** scales a rickety ladder and enters a loft of Saharan heat to track down a stash of soundtrack LPs

Soundtrack albums have always been a rich and interesting vein for the miners of the black gold, and as it's not an area of collecting I've touched on before I thought we'd look at one of my more intriguing hauls.

It was a fairly mundane July morning in Resolution Records earlier this year when an impeccably dressed elderly lady entered the shop and asked, "Are you the proprietor?" I responded in the affirmative and next came the other question I get asked most days: "Do you buy these things?"

I paused, collected myself and said, "yes madam, we buy in each and every day, what have you got to sell?" She went on to tell me that her husband, who had died three years ago, was a huge film buff and that she needed to clear out his music and memorabilia collection. She then went on to ask, "Have you heard of a composer called Ennio Morricone? He was particularly fond of his work, Lalo Schifrin, too." My alert sensors went to full-power mode. Did she just mention Ennio Morricone and Lalo Schifrin within the same breath?

We chatted on for a few more minutes and she went on to tell me that during his lifetime, he had amassed a large collection of vinyl soundtracks, cassette tapes, books, posters and DVDs. All of which had been sat in her loft untouched for all of that time. I took her address details and arranged to go round that evening.

Did I mention that it was July? It was a red-hot day already and, as any dealer will tell you, one of the worst places you can store vinyl is in a loft. This is because heat rises and heat damage is near inevitable, and they'd been sat up there for three years. I hoped and prayed that they'd been stored correctly, or they would be in a bad way by now.

I got round there nice and early. I had a feeling that this could be a tricky one, and it didn't disappoint. It was a huge house, with six or seven bedrooms, two bathrooms, a long drive, the works. I knocked on the door and was let in. The ladder up to the loft was so long that it was in two sections, not a good time to be a short-arse like me.

I clambered up the rickety ladder and, as soon as I pushed back the ceiling hatch, the wave of heat hit me like a train. Stale heat too, 'that' type of heat which has been sat there trapped for month upon month.

There, ahead of me, were three stand-up shelving units. Nice and neat I thought, but what do they hold? Records stored vertically, spine out, professionally correct. I allowed myself to hope. I reached across and scattered left to right were cassette tape holders, CD racks, poster containers and stacks and stacks of books. It was a veritable treasure trove. I barely knew where to start!

Naturally, the vinyl was my main concern and, boy, were there some beautiful soundtracks in there. As I took them out one by one, I simply couldn't believe what I was seeing. Over 75 original Ennio Morricone soundtracks; one I quickly spotted was Ennio's three-figure valued *Escalation* LP.

One of the worst places you can store vinyl is in a loft

They were mega-rare, all Italian originals, all protected in heavy-duty plastic sleeves, and as I said previously, all correctly stored.

There were over 30 original Lalo Schifrin soundtracks in there, including the mega-rare *Murderer's Row* with its distinctive yellow sleeve, perfect shape. All correct American issues, too! All immaculate. Plus 15 Quincy Jones originals, including *They Call Me Mr Tibbs!*, a lovely UK issue. Absolutely pristine!

It was gone nine before I'd satisfied myself that I'd looked into every corner, nook and cranny in that huge loft and I was finally ready to dare the comedy ladder again.

I sat the lady down at her walnut kitchen table and told her that I would need to come back the next evening with a colleague to carefully excavate the contents of that loft, and I tabled a four-figure offer for everything right there and then! The last thing a professional dealer would do in a situation like this would be to under-offer for fear of an angry refusal or even physical ejection.

My offer was graciously accepted and the deal was done. I went round the next day with a taller colleague and we emptied the loft in a couple of hours. What a great haul. Some of the soundtracks from there are still on the wall in Resolution Records. They are visually stunning and there's a part of me that doesn't want them to sell.

It would be crass of me to say just what kind of return I got from these wonderful artefacts (and am still getting), but I can safely tell you that it was the best haul of movie music I've ever had. ●

Mark O'Shaughnessy is the owner of Resolution Records in Bath and has been a professional record dealer since 1993

Terry Pastor

Known for his work on Bowie's *Hunky Dory* and *Ziggy Stardust* covers, Terry Pastor catches up with **Teri Saccone** to talk things through

Years after his famous David Bowie designs, for both the *Ziggy Stardust* album and 1971's *Hunky Dory*, Terry's work is being displayed around the world

David Bowie
Hunky Dory 1971

"This was one of my earliest album covers. It came about through a good friend of mine who was also a friend of Bowie's. David had asked him to work on the cover using a photo he had. David wasn't too pleased with the results, so I was asked to do the colour retouching on it. It was quite successful, but it was a very open brief: Just 'colour the photo'. I just put the colours in I felt worked the best. And I used a typeface I liked. The back of the sleeve, I had nothing to do with. But the front was all mine. David was quite pleased with it, so he asked me to do *Ziggy Stardust* as well, giving it the same treatment."

David Bowie
The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust & The Spiders From Mars 1972

"*Ziggy Stardust* was made within nine months of *Hunky* and when *Ziggy* exploded *Hunky* sold many more than it did on initial release. I always thought they could have been released as a double album. And both have a grainy effect, which is due to the photos and film speed. I used an airbrush for colouring it. Bowie probably knew where he was going career-wise, even back then. He was a relatively obscure artist in '71. Then *Ziggy* hit and he became immensely popular. The original black and white photo has a very dark background, so I thought putting turquoise on his suit would make it stand out. His hair was mousy then, so I made it blonde to set it off from the bricks and muted background. Bowie is the only colour in the photo, but it works. With *Ziggy*, David didn't have any real input on it. I had just finished the front cover and one night, he phoned me quite late. He asked, 'So, what's it like?' He'd no idea what it was gonna be. When he became really successful, I imagine he got much more involved as the art director. I actually prefer the back cover to the front, but both Bowie sleeves are so iconic."

Artist Terry Pastor's reputation in the music world has been powered by his seminal Bowie sleeves: *Hunky Dory* and *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*. Surprisingly, he didn't initially exploit the popularity of the images, opting to not include them in his portfolio for years. Pastor's images are often searingly bold, others subtly nuanced, but whatever the medium or methods, his designs leave a lasting impression. Unlike many artists who possess larger-than-life personas, Pastor is comparatively low key, a soulful, energetic presence who comes across almost as an observer of his own work, and the era in which he came of age.

Furthermore, he rejected the hedonism associated with the music scene in favour of grafting tirelessly, building his reputation as a graphic artist who worked in advertising, for magazines, made best-selling book jackets, and at his core, remained strong on integrity.

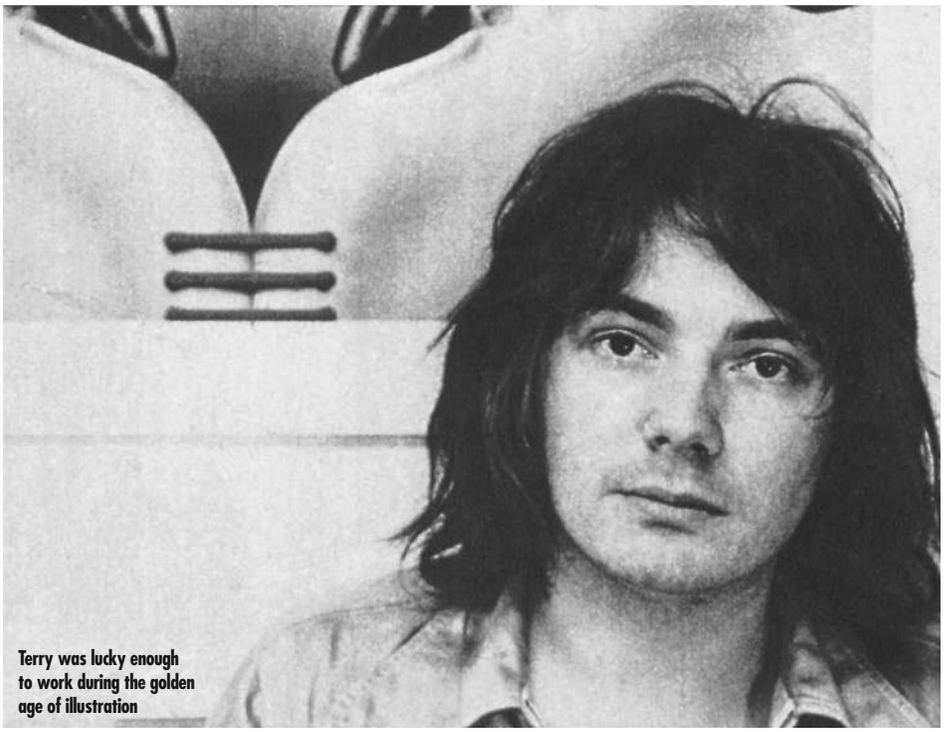
"I always preferred record covers and book jackets because, although they paid less than advertising work, the briefs were more open, affording more creative scope," he begins from his home in rural Suffolk.

Pastor grew up in a small village in the Surrey countryside. At 15, he embarked on his

"I felt like a rock star, but without the fame and fortune..."

Byzantium
Byzantium 1972

"Obviously, I went for the S&M imagery on this one. I forget who it was, but one of the band members invited me to the album launch at a live gig. I turned up, the band was feuding so badly that they split up right there. They never played that album live. Back then, artistic differences were a big deal and bands would not always put things aside. Airbrush and inks were used for that. The airbrush gives it a real degradation effect. I think I'm sort of a technical person, so that whole mechanical thing really appeals to me."



Terry was lucky enough to work during the golden age of illustration

career; self-taught, he did not go on to higher education, nor structured training. "I was good at art and fairly successful academically, except for maths. Not being great in maths, I was therefore not considered a 'good student', so I left school at 15.

"A friend's parent, who ran a commercial art studio, thought I had a talent and took me under his wing. He let me develop from there and found me employment at a commercial art studio in Fleet Street. I began as a tea boy, but eventually they saw I was capable artistically, so they put me in the retouching department, which was the most creative part of the studio. In retrospect, it was a good place to be, although I didn't realise it at the time. After three years, they sacked me, which was a great thing as I was unhappy there by 18. Having long hair and looking like a Rolling Stones clone maybe had something to do with it!

"However, it had been a good grounding for my work. So, over the next years, I painted using airbrush and inks. I then got a top agent in 1970. By then, I was creating art exclusively using the airbrush.

"I was working with Shel Talmy, the American record producer who created all the early hits for The Kinks and The Who. He also had some involvement with David Bowie in the early part of his career. I worked with Shel and his PA, Roman at his offices in Knightsbridge on concepts for album covers. I learnt so much, and I remember on several occasions being chauffeured back to my flat in a huge black Cadillac. Sitting in the back of the limo, I felt like a rock star, but without the fame or fortune!"

Speaking of rock stars, was he friends with Bowie? "No, but I met him a few times and he seemed fairly decent at every encounter. Besides doing the sleeves, my other claim to fame is that Bowie liked a jacket of mine so much so that he had one made too. I had a motorcycle jacket made by Julia Burgess with an applique of the name of my studio 'Main Artery' on the back, which spilled out to the front with clouds. David saw the jacket when he was at my studio in Covent Garden and asked Julia if she could make a similar jacket."

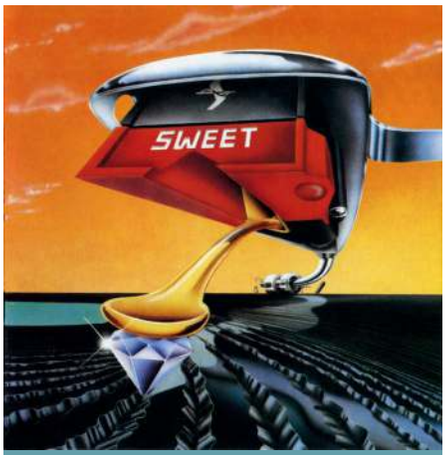
Pastor reflects positively on the 70s, the decade when his career began to flourish. "I was working in Covent Garden back then and the rent was so cheap. Life was far less stressful, there was not a problem paying the bills and we had a good social life as well. Life seemed far less complicated. Artistically, I think the golden age for illustration was the mid 60s to late 70s.

"Nowadays, Covent Garden is a very commercial hub. It's unrecognisable from living there in the 70s. It's now only for the wealthy. Even Heddon Street, where the *Ziggy* cover was shot, was a grungy place. Back in the early days, I never even considered myself poor, just broke."

Pastor is cognisant of his artistic strengths, and has played to them throughout his career. "I was influenced by artists like Magritte, Dali and American pop artists rather than illustrators," he says. "But I was never a painter, I was more pragmatic. I guess my stronger influence is graphics."

Today, Pastor creates art partially utilising digital tools alongside the airbrush. "With

"Heddon Street, where the Ziggy cover was shot, was a grungy place"



The Sweet
Off The Record 1977

"As their career developed, they got more into cross-dressing, but this was early on. It was not my idea to have all the drug references on it. Sadly, too many rock stars died of overdoses, and the same rock stars who died that way also had fame and fortune, so it always mystified me. I don't know if it was the incredible adrenaline rushes they got onstage, which they wanted to keep going when they got off, or what it was. Serious addiction was rampant. Anyway, the gold piece coming off the stylus was meant to be a coke spoon, but I didn't come up with that concept. The engineer for the LP had the idea for the stylus coming towards you. The Sweet loved that so much they had me do a second one. I never actually met them, although I liked their music a lot. Way more than other glam-rock bands of the 70s."

The Sweet
Levelheaded 1978

"It was done with an image of a Thunderbird guitar, and where the pickups were it was a cassette tape slot. The engineer came up with that idea, and I guess I made it work."

Ginger Wildheart
555% 2012

"This was a triple-vinyl album. I did a cassette tape spooling onto the ground. Ginger is a serious Bowie fan and commissioned me to do the artwork as I had created the Bowie album covers, which he had always loved. The front of the cassette features a razor blade, the ubiquitous drug reference. It's a similar sort of thing as the coke spoon on The Sweet *Off The Record* cover. Ginger phoned me after receiving the artwork and was so blown away by it, he went on about how much he loved it, that I became a bit embarrassed. Still, better than not liking it. I contacted his management last year to see if I could meet up with him, as he was gigging locally. They asked him if that would be OK and he replied, 'Absolutely, Terry is a legend'. I met up with Ginger backstage. He looks a bit wild, but is very charming"

airbrush, you have to be sure the drawing is absolutely correct, because when you start with airbrush you can't go back and alter it. My drawing is not my strong point, so I have to do sketch after sketch, refining it as I go to make it perfectly exact.

"I never put *Ziggy Stardust* or *Hunky Dory* in my portfolios at the time because I was terribly dismissive of them, as they were not pure illustrations. My input was colourisation of photographs, and the design for the title artwork and graphics. It wasn't until probably the mid 2000s that both those covers became iconic or fashionable. It was then that I began to take more notice of them.

"Funnily enough, no one hired me commercially based on those after Bowie's success, but in late 2018 I did use the same airbrush techniques colouring black and white photos for the American Gucci campaign. They approached me because of those Bowie covers. But it took someone 40 years!"

There are rumours that Pastor's original artwork for the *Ziggy* and *Hunky Dory* covers was destroyed, but he dispels this myth: "The originals I did went to Tony Defries, Bowie's manager. Those don't exist anymore from what I can gather. I went to the Bowie exhibition at the V&A and didn't see them there.

"I was talking to Bill Nighy there, who was looking at *Hunky*. He said, 'My friend donated that to the V&A and it's the original'. I said, 'I'm afraid it's not. I'm the one who designed it and this is not the original, as mine were 12 inches square and these are six inches square', plus the airbrushing was not too good either."

Because he suspected the originals were missing and might not ever resurface, Pastor remade the *Ziggy* front and back artwork. "I redid them a year before Bowie died. I thought they'd be the next best things to the originals. So I airbrushed them on canvas as opposed to paper. I replicated them, as I wanted to have artwork as close to the originals which I had created in 1972."

These days, Pastor is still creating art prodigiously. "I don't really do commercial work these days. I publish my own artwork, it's post-pop. I use a lot of digital techniques, which allow me to go to places creatively traditional methods would not. If people ask me to describe my art, I say to them, 'I'm more Disney than DaVinci'," he laughs.

"I always felt being an artist was better than working. Yes, art is a discipline and you must work hard to be a professional. I don't just go for jobs and simply whack in the artwork without real thought and consideration to the aims of the images. Maybe other artists can work that way but for me, it's important to do aesthetically what works best.

"Anyway, I refer to myself now as a 'Gentleman Artist'. Also, I'm relatively sane despite being a creative person…" ●

Choice Cuts #32

Joe Meek

I HEAR A NEW WORLD

TRIUMPH

The troubled producer teamed up with the Blue Men to produce a space-age EP. **Glen Bushell** looks to the skies

At his peak in the late 50s and early 60s, Joe Meek was one of the finest record producers of all time. His experimental and space-age sound gave a whole new texture to the music of artists he worked with, and he will be remembered as a visionary who was ahead of his time. While some of the releases he is credited with are regularly found in collections from the time, a rarity that often slips through the net is his 1960 release, *I Hear A New World*.

The record is billed as 'an Outer Space Music Fantasy by Joe Meek' and features four tracks credited to the Blue Men (a skiffle group from Acton), who under the guidance of Meek ventured into a far more unique, celestial territory. They incorporated all manner of primitive sonic trickery, gurgling bubbles, surf-esque guitar, vari-speed vocal effects and more across the EP.

It was released on Meek's short-lived Triumph label in stereo, and only 99 copies are said to have been pressed. It was pressed with a four-prong push-out centre and comes in a front-laminated picture sleeve. To the untrained eye, it would look like any period 7" if it appeared in a collection, and you would be forgiven for passing by it without a second look.

I Hear A New World is considered by Meek enthusiasts to be the 'holy grail' of his catalogue, and when it does become available on the open market it tends to change hands for around £495 in Mint condition. ●

Wax Facts

JOE MEEK
I HEAR A NEW WORLD
BLACK
1960

£495

Reviews

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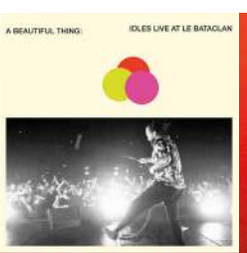
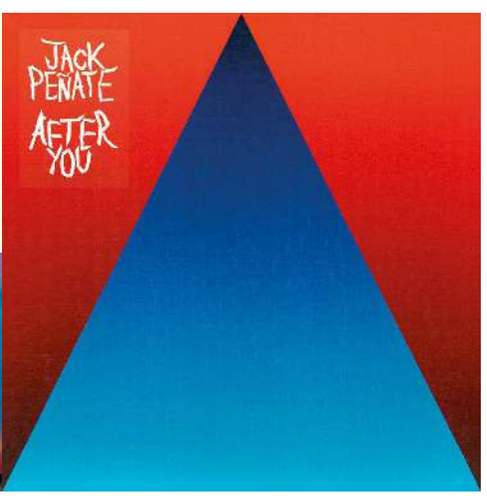




The Beatles

THE SINGLES COLLECTION

APPLE/EMI

LONG LIVE VINYL EDITOR'S CHOICE

23 seven-inch singles newly cut for vinyl from their original mastertapes at Abbey Road with reproduced international picture sleeves. What's not to like? **Steve Harnell** opens the box

WHAT'S INSIDE

1 Love Me Do (US)
2 Please Please Me (Italy)
3 From Me To You (Norway)
4 She Loves You (Greece)
5 I Want To Hold Your Hand (Chile)
6 Can't Buy Me Love (Austria)
7 A Hard Day's Night (Holland)
8 I Feel Fine (Sweden)
9 Ticket To Ride (Spain)
10 Help! (Belgium)
11 We Can Work It Out (France)
12 Paperback Writer (Turkey)
13 Eleanor Rigby (Argentina)
14 Strawberry Fields Forever (Denmark)
15 All You Need Is Love (Germany)
16 Hello, Goodbye (Brazil)
17 Lady Madonna (Japan)
18 Hey Jude (South Africa)
19 Get Back (Portugal)
20 The Ballad Of John And Yoko (Mexico)
21 Come Together (Israel)
22 Let It Be (UK)
23 Free As A Bird (Global)

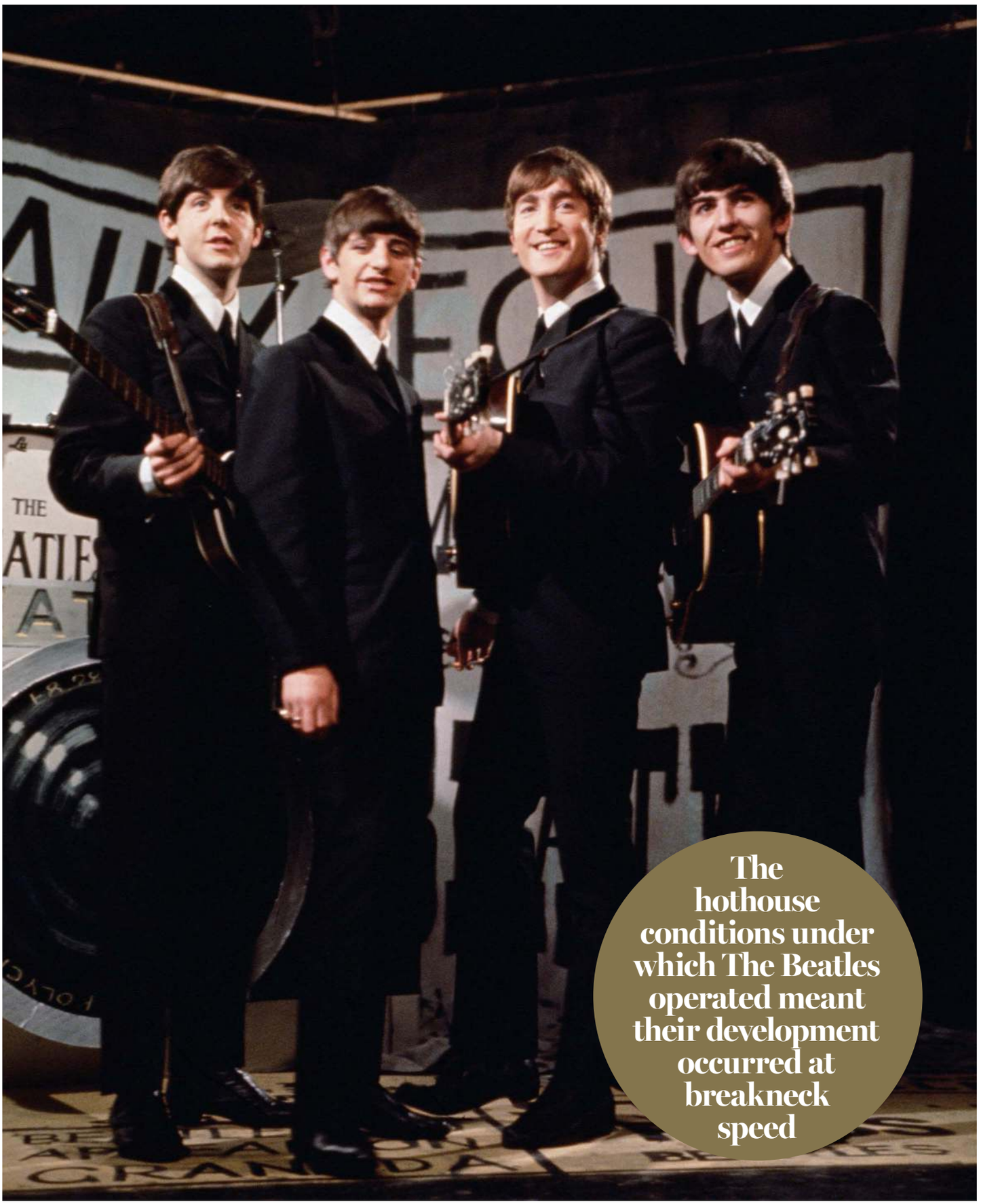
Compiling The Beatles' recording career across 22 singles, plus a new-to-vinyl double A-side 7" that scoops up the *Anthology*-era 'Threetles' encore, this limited edition boxset has been remastered for vinyl at Abbey Road from the original mastertapes. Effectively, it's the narrative arc of 60s British pop in microcosm – from the beat boom years through to the emergence of psychedelia and incorporation of World music influences to an eventual acceptance of classicist songwriting principles.

With a different tracklisting, Parlophone first issued a Beatles singles box way back in 1982, and on a purely practical level you can, of course, find the vast majority of this material via the *1* and *Past Masters* compilations. But that's not really the point. This latest offering is a superior proposition thanks to the impeccable remastering work and the addition of *Free As A Bird* and *Real Love*.

With most of The Beatles' original 1960s UK singles issued in desultory plain sleeves, Apple have looked elsewhere for design flair and given this collection an international flavour. From the Beatle wig illustration on the Austrian release of *Can't Buy Me Love* to the garish pink Belgian sleeve for *Help!*, the wonderful Japanese imprint of *Lady Madonna* (its photo is from the video shoot for *Strawberry Fields Forever*, but we won't quibble about that) and an evocative ink illustration of moustachioed Beatles on 1968's *Revolution*, which declares *Hey Jude* to be the B-side, these faithfully reproduced picture sleeves are time capsules in themselves. Also included is a 40-page booklet boasting photos, ephemera and essays by Beatles historian Kevin Howlett.

And what of the music? Well, the hothouse conditions that The Beatles operated under means their development occurred at breakneck speed. The bare-bones likes of *Love Me Do* and *Please Please Me* are soon superseded by the earworm melodicism of *I Feel Fine* and no-holds-barred rock 'n' roller *She's A Woman*, the latter a much underrated vocal from McCartney. By *Ticket To Ride*, Ringo is confidently asserting himself and developing his own unique style behind the kit – you can hear every crunch and nuance on these remasters. Likewise, George's unusual strangulated volume pedal additions to *Yes It Is* sound rich and full.

You won't need us to tell you about the perfection of arguably the greatest double A-side single of all time, *Strawberry Fields Forever* and *Penny Lane*, but perhaps the lesser-known delights at the dustier end of The Beatles' back catalogue will now get more attention. Harrison's bite-sized take on Indian mysticism works well on the pretty *The Inner Light*, the throwaway *Old Brown Shoe* is rather charming and Lennon's self-referencing reportage style he explored more fully in his solo work gets an early airing on *The Ballad Of John And Yoko*. A clear contender for the silliest entry in The Beatles' back catalogue, the Goons homage *You Know My Name (Look Up The Number)* is testament to the fact the band's tongues were often not too far from their cheeks. Elsewhere, this is seriously good stuff. **9**



The hothouse conditions under which The Beatles operated meant their development occurred at breakneck speed

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

Queens Of The Stone Age

RATED R/SONGS FOR THE DEAF/
LULLABIES TO PARALYZE/ERA VULGARIS

UMC

"Come here Mr Fly, I am going to kill you…" It's 11am, early May 2000 and there are three of us in a tiny beer bottle-strewn Kensington hotel room. One looks like Elvis; the second, now pursuing the hapless insect, is bald with a wizard's beard; and the third, slightly uneasy one is this writer. Queen of The Stone Age are drinking their breakfast. 'Ginger Elvis' frontman Josh Homme and bass-playing diptera-terror Nick Oliveri were promoting UK debut *Rated R,* which is now part of a quartet that Universal are releasing on vinyl. The duo had already released a brace of albums as cult stoner-rock outfit Kyuss and Homme had also put out a well-received QOTSA debut.

The key difference with *Rated R* and its successors is Homme's confidence as a singer and pin-sharp pop sensibility. Fans of stoner rock and repetitive riffage are never short-changed, but those wanting a take-away melody are equally blessed: *Rated R*'s *The Lost Art of Keeping A Secret* and *Feel Good Hit Of The Summer* still sound astonishing and 2002's *Songs For The Deaf*'s hitlist includes classics *No One Knows* and *Go With The Flow.* With the departure of Oliveri, and resulting line-up confusion, 2005's *Lullabies To Paralyze* is slightly meandering and unfocused, but 2007's *Era Vulgaris* is the band back on track with syncopated groovers including *Make It Wit Chu* and *I'm Designer.* All four albums have previously only received limited vinyl attention, so don't miss this opportunity to catch them. Just like Oliveri did with the fly.

Ben Wardle

9

The Staple Singers

COME GO WITH ME: THE STAX COLLECTION

CRAFT RECORDINGS

Straddling emotive gospel, soul and civil rights protest anthems, The Staple Singers were always a unique proposition as a family band. Their six-album tenure with Stax was the absolute peak of their recording career, both artistically and commercially. *Soul Folk In Action,* their debut on Stax, with guitarist Steve Cropper in the producer's chair, was loaded with powerful significance. *Long Walk To D.C.* and *The Ghetto* find the group at their most emotively political, while the poignant cover of the much-missed Otis Redding's *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay* and The Band's *The Weight* are both goosebump-inducing. Cropper returned for the polished follow-up LP *We'll Get Over,* that included a spirited take on Sly And The Family Stone's *Everyday People* and a gutsy version of Gladys Knight And The Pips' *The End Of Our Road.*

When those opening two LPs failed to shift significant numbers, Stax co-president Al Bell took over as producer and roped in the fabled Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section for 1971's *The Staple Swingers,* a funkier take on the group's soulful sound boasting the slinky drama of *Almost* and slide blues standout *What's Your Thing.* The team stayed in place for The Staple Singers' most dynamic offering, too. *Be Altitude: Respect Yourself* turned them into mainstream stars without diluting their principles. They never bettered it, although subsequent LPs *Be What You Are* and *City In The Sky* both contain gems, including the fiery *Washington We're Watching You.* A bonus disc adds rarities, live cuts from their Wattstax appearance and non-album singles.

Steve Harnell

7

Happy Mondays

THE EARLY EPS

LONDON

They're back! Again! The Mondays (now a crack team of Shaun, Bez and Rowetta) are on a 'Greatest Hits' tour, which runs until the end of 2019 and London Records are on a re-release tip. First up is this boxset of the band's early EPs. 1985's *Forty Five* contains tunes which have more in common with the conventional arpeggio guitar prettiness of James or even The Smiths. Ryder actually sings rather well. Once the band hit their stride with the distinctive gravelly street funk of *Tart Tart,* things become more interesting. Its B-side, *Little Matchstick Owen's Rap* starts promisingly but is marred by sound engineer Mike Bleach's pub singer improvised vocals. Other rarities such as B-sides *Yahoo* and *Wah Wah (Think Tank)* are better and Central Station's beautiful artwork make this set just about worth the cost of admission. ***Ben Wardle*** **7**

Not The Nine O'Clock News

NOT ALL THE ALBUMS AGAIN

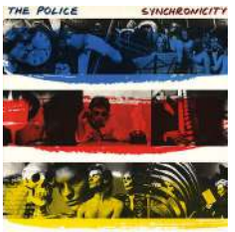
DEMON

In the same way The Specials came back as relevant as ever this year, this boxset of the early-80s sketch show quartet holds up well: the political tropes are posho Tories v Marxist Labour. Shorn of the visuals over their three albums, you lose Rowan Atkinson and Pamela Stephenson's physical comedy. But the verbal dexterity from writers of the calibre of John Lloyd, Richard Curtis and Andy Hamilton will always work. The energy of Mel Smith's comedy songs satirising punk and *NWOBHM* hasn't dated – there's even a Soft Cell sketch satirising what became Autotune. Some of the language shows political correctness hadn't become fully established by 1982. That apart, it all makes you realise why we need sketch shows on TV again. *John Earls* **8**

The Police

REGGATTA DE BLANC/ZENYATTA MONDATTA/GHOST IN THE MACHINE/ SYNCHRONICITY

POLYDOR



Now available beyond last year's boxset (excluding, inexplicably, their debut, *Outlandos D'Amour)* these remastered versions of the Police's studio albums offer a largely gratifying reminder of the band's five-year ascendancy. Their legacy was their rock-reggae mix, whether *Regatta*'s classic *Walking On The Moon* or *Zenyatta*'s *Don't Stand So Close To Me*. But, though *Ghost…* delivered 1981's *Spirits In The Material World* and *Demolition Man,* and 1983's *Synchronicity* the lilting *Wrapped Around Your Finger,* their final two albums leaned a little smugly on jazz influences. Still, mixed results often came with Police territory: despite many gems, *Zenyatta*'s *Canary In A Coalmine* is barely a novelty tune, and *Synchronicity*'s *Mother* is truly embarrassing. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **7**

Mott The Hoople

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

MADFISH

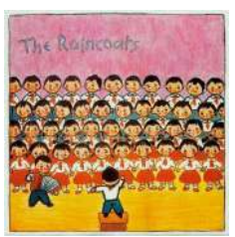
For those poor souls not familiar with every track on every Mott LP, there's long been a need for a compilation that covers the band's CBS-era glam-rock heyday and looks beyond songs included on the single-disc *Greatest Hits* (1976). Marking Mott's 50th anniversary, this double set does the job admirably by mixing up familiar chartbusters such as *All The Young Dudes, Honaloochie Boogie* and *Roll Away The Stone* with choice album cuts. Mott fans will, of course, quibble with the specific track listing, but in truth you could choose virtually any 20 Mott songs, and you'd arrive at the same mix of thunderous rock 'n' roll riffs and shameless self-mythologising, a combination lifted to poetic heights by Ian Hunter's ability to project bruised romanticism. It features sleeve notes by Mott and Hunter's biographer Campbell Devine. *Jonathan Wright* **8**

The Raincoats

THE RAINCOATS

WE THREE

LONG LIVE VINYL EDITOR'S CHOICE



The Raincoats helped to shape the romantic concept that punk is best defined as what you make it. They were part of the first wave of female punk outfits, along with The Slits, Ana Da Silva, Gina Birch and Palmolive, and Vicky Aspinall's debut is an important record, laying the groundwork for the Riot Grrrl movement, and inspiring heavyweight artists such as Kurt Cobain and Kim Gordon in the process (with the Nirvana man describing it in near-biblical terms as a "wonderfully classic scripture"). For The Raincoats, making music was an act of the most instinctive expression, and the album set a vital, early precedent for feminist work within a DIY context. It's best known for its off-kilter cover of The Kinks' *Lola,* while *The Void* was covered by Hole in 1994. This 40th Anniversary edition has been remastered from the original tapes, with a limited edition pressed onto marble vinyl. ***Gary Tipp*** **9**

Antoinette Konan

ANTOINETTE KONAN

AWESOME TAPES FROM AFRICA

Ivory Coast music legend Konan's debut was originally released in 1986, but this is its first full-length reissue. The cover art depicts the instrument which, along with her voice, made Konan's name: the ahoko. This is essentially a ribbed stick, against which a chunk of wood is rhythmically scraped and then amplified by a hollow nutshell. Konan augments it with the latest technology of the time: synths and drum machines. *Abidjan Adja* is a beautiful symphony of polyrhythms created by constant scraping of the ahoko, combined with syndrums, guitar arpeggio and Konan's amazing vocals. It's worth the cost of admission alone. Some tracks are less convincing, such as the pretty but pedestrian *Enfants Du Monde,* but overall the album is a rare treat from the dawn of music's globalisation. *Ben Wardle* **8**

The Band

THE BAND 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

CAPITAL/UMG

The Band's debut LP *Music From Big Pink* was undoubtedly a cultural game-changer, but its eponymous follow-up (aka 'The Brown Album') was the point at which they achieved true greatness. Predating their contemporaries' back-to-basics approach that ended the 60s on a nostalgic note, The Band dipped their hairy toes into a rich history of North American roots music and came up with an incredibly diverse gumbo all of their own; the quintet's multi-instrumentalist chops were almost unparalleled. Refined by years of hard work on the club circuit during their incarnation as The Hawks and chiselled into a crack unit after a trial by fire backing Bob Dylan, there's no weak link. Levon Helm and Rick Danko provide a superbly tight rhythm section, Richard Manuel's piano work is an absolute joy and Robbie Robertson's understated guitar serves the songs rather than dominating them; his only solo here is dropped into the funky farmer's plea of *King Harvest (Has Surely Come)*. And in keys man (and anything else lying around to hand) Garth Hudson, The Band possessed a wildcard musician who had very few equals. The fluidity on show as they switch between styles here is utterly dazzling, from the rollicking hoedown of *Rag Mama Rag*, boisterous *Up On Cripple Creek* and swaggering *Look Out Cleveland*, they could rock out when they wanted to. But they're equally assured on the plaintive likes of *Whispering Pines* and *Rockin' Chair*. All this and the wonderful *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*, freshly minted in 1969 but sounding like an American Songbook standard from the previous century. ***Steve Harnell***

10

The Go-Betweens

G STANDS FOR GO-BETWEENS: VOLUME 2

DOMINO

If commercial success can be measured solely by the quality of the retrospective boxset treatment given to a band after their recording days are over, then The Go-Betweens must have been multi-unit-shifting global superstars. Over five wonderful LPs, five intriguing CDs, and an extensive 112-page book, Volume 2 of *G Stands For Go-Betweens* is a wonderfully well put together package that satisfyingly presses all the buttons of the Aussie band's staunchly devoted fanbase. And that's without mentioning that the first 400 orders, in similar fashion to *Volume 1*, will receive a randomly selected book from late band member Grant McLennan's personal collection. Of course, in reality, The Go-Betweens were nothing of the sort, and much has been made of the band's inability to turn critical acclaim into sales, yet, ultimately, the enduringly voracious appetite for their music adds up to a strong legacy. *Volume 2* documents the band's semi-imperious mid-career phase and contains three fan favourite studio albums: the darkly poetic *Liberty Belle And The Black Diamond Express* (1986), the exotic *Tallulah* (1987) and the breezy sunshine pop of *16 Lover's Lane* (1988). The other two slabs of vinyl are dedicated to a previously unreleased Town & Country Club performance dating back to May 1987. Additionally, the box comes with five CDs of B-sides, radio sessions and rare, hard-to-find and unreleased demos, which while very nice to have would clearly be better served on vinyl. *Gary Tipp*

9

ELLIOTT LANDY/LANDYVISION, INC STEVE DOUBLE

Nirvana

UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK

GEFFEN/UMC

25 years on and Nirvana's *Unplugged In New York* remains a moving experience. Stripped-down versions of *Dumb* and *All Apologies*, alongside covers of songs like *Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A Sunbeam* and *Lake Of Fire*, sound as compelling now as they did when the concert was first posthumously released following Kurt Cobain's passing in 1994. Indeed, the deeply poignant rendition of Lead Belly's *Where Did You Sleep Last Night?*, which closes the set, is an absorbing acoustic appetiser of what could've been had Cobain followed in the footsteps of his friend, and former troubled Screaming Trees frontman, Mark Lanegan. A moot point perhaps, but one thing is certain, this 2LP set is a must for anyone whose life changed after finding Nirvana. The concert is essential, but just how many times you play Side D is up to you. ***Dan Biggane*** **9**

The Blue Nile

HATS/PEACE AT LAST/A WALK ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS

CONFETTI RECORDS

From *A Walk Across The Rooftops*' ghostly brass to the slow-burning climax of *Hats' Saturday Night*, the romance of The Blue Nile's emotional, twilit portrait of Glasgow remains unsurpassed. Distinguished by lush, shimmering synths and spare rhythms, 1984's *Stay* granted synthetic sounds a human sincerity, and exotic metallic ripples decorated *Heatwave*'s unhurried elegance. *Hats* opened in even more measured fashion, *Over The Hillside*'s dusky minimalism provoking "stars in your eyes". Their third failed to match such soulful invention. Nonetheless, a gospel choir underlined *Happiness*'s spiritual dimension, and ballad *Family Life* was as touching as its title. Remastered by Calum Malcolm, these vinyl reissues are indispensable. *Wyndham Wallace* **9**

Various Artists

MOGADISCO: DANCING MOGADISHU SOMALIA 1972-1991

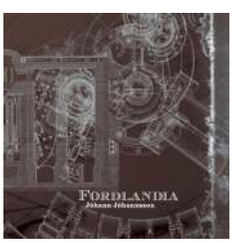
ANALOG AFRICA

As the sleeve notes from Analog Africa founder Samy Ben Redjeb make clear, researching the music of Somalia is a task that goes far beyond mere cratedigging. Travelling to Mogadishu in 2016, a city where, according to UK government travel advice, there is the "constant threat of terrorist attack", he finds just one B&B owner "crazy enough" to host a foreigner. But be grateful Redjeb made the effort because the tracks on *Mogadisco*, found by rifling through tapes held at Radio Mogadishu with the help of archive chief Colonel Abshir Hashi Ali, are glorious. Highlights range from Dur Dur Band's *Daraadaa Muxibo* to Iftin Band's *Sirmaqabe*, which sounds disconcertingly like a lost TV theme, but it's the overall vibe that stays with you, funky, but imbued with strands of desert blues and reggae. ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Jóhann Jóhannsson

FORDLÂNDIA

4AD



Neither as radical as *Virðulegu Forsetar*, nor as emotionally devastating as *IBM 1401, A User's Manual*, Jóhannsson's fourth was nonetheless more ambitious still. Inspired by Henry Ford's failed attempt to establish a rubber plantation in the Brazilian Amazon, he again employed The City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, picking up where *IBM…* left off with stately strings and swirling electronics for the title track's doleful drama. But he broadened his horizons on *melodia (i)* and *melodia (iv)*, using clarinets to create slow-motion Reichian landscapes, and a choir adds a spiritual quality to the serene *The Great God Pan Is Dead*'s middle section. *Chimaerica* deployed *Virðulegu Forsetar*'s pipe organ to eerie effect, before *How We Left Fordlandia* offered further evidence of his grand vision. *Wyndham Wallace* **8**

The Dukes Of Stratosphear

25 O'CLOCK/PSONIC PSUNSPOT

PANEGYRIC

Seemingly preserved in amber, the Dukes Of Stratosphear's debut sounded so psychedelic it was a mystery its six tracks had been overlooked by Lenny Kaye's *Nuggets* compilation. In fact, they'd been recently recorded by XTC over mere days in a small studio, its limitations the mother of invention. *25 O'Clock* celebrated The Electric Prunes' *I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)*, while *What In The World?* nodded to The Beatles' *Tomorrow Never Knows*. *Psonic Psunspot*'s bigger budget made it less 'authentic', but highlights were truly high: *You're A Good Man Albert Brown* paired Small Faces with *Ram*-era McCartney, *Shiny Cage* Pink Floyd with The Kinks, while *Pale And Precious* confirmed their respect for Brian Wilson. Truly, freakily timeless. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

Throbbing Gristle

PART TWO: THE ENDLESS NOT/TG NOW/A SOUVENIR OF CAMBER SANDS

MUTE

In 2004, Throbbing Gristle re-formed. Considering the tensions that led to the first split, the news that Genesis P-Orridge, Chris Carter, Peter Christopherson and Cosey Fanni Tutti were making music together was at the very least surprising. Could anything they produced have the same impact as earlier work? Perhaps not, but as these reissues show (see *TG Now* as testing creative waters, *Part Two* as offering clues as to how the band might have developed and *Camber Sands* a live document), a sense of unfinished business propelled them to make music that was austere yet with an underlying sense of structure quite unlike that offered by any other band. *Part Two: The Endless Not* and *TG Now* are released as a triple clear vinyl boxset. *Jonathan Wright* **7**

Beck

HYPERSPACE
CAPITOL

Beck is back for his 14th studio album and he teams up with co-conspirator Pharrell Williams for a relatively relaxed collection of twinkling sci-fi starscapes. **John Earls** takes stock

TRACKLIST

1 Hyperlife
2 Uneventful Days
3 Saw Lightning
4 Die Waiting
5 Chemical
6 See Through
7 Hyperspace
8 Stratosphere
9 Dark Places
10 Star
11 Everlasting Nothing

The best Beck albums can generally be divided into the funk showmanship of *Odelay* and *Midnite Vultures* or the confessional romantic on *Sea Change* and *Morning Phase*. Previous album *Colors* in 2017 was firmly in the former camp, a return to kicking loose after Beck recovered from the back problems that literally stopped him dancing. It initially appeared that *Hyperspace* would follow that trend. First single *Saw Lightning* was as futuristic and frantic as you'd hope from getting Pharrell Williams onboard as co-conspirator.

However, subsequent singles *Uneventful Days* and *Dark Places* have seen the pair try a new twist on Beck's balladeering – he's as melancholic as *Morning Phase*, but as the album title suggests, the soundbed is more of a twinkling sci-fi starscape. They're both sweet, as are other ruminations, such as *See Through* and *Chemical*, but they could be by any number of Pharrell's past collaborators. Just when it looks like Beck is happy to drift along amiably, *Hyperspace* kicks into life on Side Two. The album had stepped up on *Die Waiting*, a gorgeous, loose shuffle made with longtime Beck associate Cole M.G.N. It's matched by *Stratosphere*, an affecting, poignant slice of prime Beck romanticism. The credits claim Chris Martin sings backing vocals, but good luck in detecting his presence. A more distinctive guest appearance comes from newcomer Terrell Hines, his rap ensuring the title track is as colourful as the vivid album cover. Beck was one of the first to spot the talent of Greg Kurstin, the super-producer back here on *See Through*. Don't be surprised if Hines becomes an equally stellar name, if *Hyperspace* is any judge.

Other than *Saw Lightning*, the most up-tempo moment comes on *Star*. Made with Paul Epworth, its cartoon pop is hardly unique for Beck, but anything that evokes *Where It's At* and *Timebomb* is always welcome. The highlight is *Everlasting Nothing*, Beck and Pharrell relaxing for a moment to let Beck's unusually rasping downhome growl carry the album out into the stars, finally reaching hyperspace. Like Beck's best songs, it's too good to be contained by mere Earth atmosphere.

Quite where *Hyperspace* fits into Beck's canon is an interesting point. It lacks the single-minded vision of his outright classics yet, in feeling more relaxed than usual, it has a charm distinct from his other work. It's his most varied work since 2006's *The Information*, a record that's hardly seen as Beck's greatest work. But because Beck seems mostly content as he eases into being an elder statesman, it wouldn't be surprising if *Hyperspace* proves transitional later on.

Nobody, least of all Beck himself, can predict his future albums, but you sense from the contemplative nature of *Stratosphere* and *Chemical* that he's taking stock. Not so much *Morning Phase* as *Afternoon Phase*. It's not his dazzling finest, but there are enough moments of spectral wonder to convince you *Hyperspace* has arrived from a brighter galaxy. **7**

TOM HAM

Coldplay

EVERYDAY LIFE

PARLOPHONE

Though they remain one of the world's biggest bands, it's been pretty easy to deride Coldplay since 2011's laughable *Mylo Xlyoto*. *Everyday Life*, however, represents a complete reinvention. Their most considered collection in years, it finds inspiration in unlikely sources, including Afrobeat, gospel, folk and blues, first signposted by *Arabesque*, their brassy collaboration with Femi Kuti. Its rolling rhythms sweep Chris Martin convincingly from cornball lyrics about "two raindrops in the same sea", via samples of Kuti's father Fela and an ultimately explosive crescendo, to a howled final line, "We share the same fucking blood!" Remarkably, he curses again amid the Tim Buckley-esque *Guns*' frantic acoustic guitars, but his band's reticence is most revelatory. There's room for nuance almost throughout, with *BrokEn*'s gospel lacking the protracted bombast of U2's *Rattle & Hum*, *Daddy* a felted piano ballad sung, like Lily Allen's *Three*, from a child's perspective, and *Old Friends* a folksy paean delivered with Nick Drake's hushed delicacy. There are, inevitably, some quintessential 'Coldplay moments': *Orphans* can't resist a "Wooh wooh" chorus, but even this refuses to outstay its welcome, while *Èkó* could be Paul Simon, and *Wonder Of The World* is so intimate it was seemingly recorded on a phone. But *Trouble In Town* will haunt longest, with its Peter Gabriel *In Our Eyes* first half interrupted by samples of raging American servicemen, then topped by a spinetingling, dramatic coda. This is the Coldplay we need. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **9**

IDLES

A BEAUTIFUL THING: IDLES LIVE AT LE BATACLAN

PARTISAN

A huge step up from the slew of live albums bands are self-releasing on their webstores, IDLES' document from the last night of their *Joy As An Act Of Resistance* tour in Paris mirrors its parent album. The deluxe edition of *JAAAOR* allowed you to choose your own sleeve. *A Beautiful Thing* has three different versions, varying sleeves for each vinyl colour: bassist Adam Devonshire high-stepping across the orange's sleeve wins it. Each edition contains *Kangk*, a neat booklet of gig photos and Joe Talbot's poetry. Anyone lucky enough to see IDLES live will probably have wondered just how they manage to sound so tight, considering the visual spectacle and apparent mayhem kicking off at every moment. If anything, this 18-song set only makes it more of a marvel – IDLES sound even sharper and more focused when you're not in the middle of their communal catharsis. You can sense aggro building on tense opener *Colossus*, Talbot appealing for love and respect only to undercut it by hollering, "Let's fucking go!" into a blistering *Never Fight A Man With A Perm*. Lesser-known songs like *1049 Gotho* grow claws, Jon Beavis' drumming heroic throughout it all. Talbot namechecks Zinedine Zidane during an especially wild *Well Done*, his vocals on *White Privilege* suppler than he's usually given credit for. IDLES shows are one of the most reliably ecstatic experiences on offer right now. *A Beautiful Thing* is a near-perfect way to relive it all – and on vinyl you won't be in any danger from flying limbs. *John Earls* **9**

The Flaming Lips
THE SOFT BULLETIN: LIVE AT RED ROCKS
BELLA UNION

In May 2016, The Flaming Lips fetched up at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado. Waiting for the band were conductor Andre De Ridder, the Colorado Symphony and members of its chorus. Together, they would perform in full the Lips' 1999 breakthrough album, *The Soft Bulletin*. Marking 20 years since the album's release, here at last is a recording of what was clearly a glorious performance, one of those moments when a band sometimes prone to self-indulgence got things exactly right. It helps, of course, that *The Soft Bulletin* is not just the Lips' most cohesive LP, but a peerless masterpiece of symphonic pop able to handle the extra weight of additional strings, horns and, making insect noises at Wayne Coyne's request, audience participation. From the moment the thunderous drums kick in on *Race For The Prize*, it's utterly joyful. ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Yann Tiersen
PORTRAIT
MUTE

Usually when artists start diving into their own back catalogue as a means of musical progression it results in regressive disaster more than it does any kind of successful recapturing of previous highs. However, Tiersen's decision here to re-record a huge chunk of his own music works out remarkably well. Guests John Grant, Gruff Rhys and Sunn O)))'s Stephen O'Malley all appear to add a new tone, essence and sense of personality to Tiersen's catalogue; and there are five new tracks too. His string work and rich, cinematic compositions are still the backbone to his musical approach, but the tracks feel both reconceptualised and fleshed out here. Plus, any place you can hear Grant's caramel-smooth voice in the same place as O'Malley's ground-trembling guitar is surely one that's worth visiting. *Daniel Dylan Wray* **8**

Susanne Sundfør
MUSIC FOR PEOPLE IN TROUBLE: LIVE FROM THE BARBICAN
BELLA UNION

For her 2018 Barbican show, perhaps thanks to the huge veil behind which she plays, Norway's Susanne Sundfør seems initially unconcerned by any expectations of drama. Opener *Mantra* is delivered in an unusually understated fashion, accompanied only by acoustic guitar, and *Reincarnation* a spooky country tune whose pedal steel underlines echoes of Dolly Parton. Furthermore, *No One Believes In Love Anymore*, performed later on in the set, confirms this reticence isn't merely nerves. But Sundfør's often felt theatrical and soon she's wailing as if from an Arctic mountain top on *The Sound Of War*, a synth's drones interrupting like an incoming spitfire before it slides into the realms of Enya and Vangelis, and closer *Mountaineers*. Despite frequent, gratuitous solos, fans can at least revel in her conviction. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **6**

Poliça
WHEN WE STAY ALIVE
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Written while recovering from a roof fall that left Poliça's Channy Leaneagh with a broken vertebrae in her back, she has chosen to use this album to retell her accident and imagine it without the disaster ending. Musically, the album remains in the territory that has become fairly common ground for Leaneagh – a merging of slick electronics, R&B grooves, neo-soul flair and a stirring and often soaring vocal delivery. There's an at times woozy and immersive hue to this record, but also at points there's a notably more propulsive and charging intensity, such as the glitchy beat-ridden *Fold Up. When We Stay Alive* is best when it's in this mode, as some of the slower tracks that revolve around ballad-like vocals tend to dissolve in comparison. Regardless of that, there's plenty to take out of this album. *Daniel Dylan Wray* **8**

Graham Coxon
THE END OF THE F***ING WORLD 2
GRAHAM COXON

*The End Of The F***ing World* is a f***ing great TV show, and, especially when one considers its breadth, this is Graham Coxon's second f***ing great score. He's completely at home on *Madder Than Me*, a suburban basement, distorted guitar racket, and at ease on *Why Are You Crying?*, a gentle Townes Van Zandt ramble. He also turns in a lovely duet, *Bonjour, Monsieur*, in the vein of Françoise Hardy's early work, while *Beautiful Bad* is a noisy, psychedelic shamble like Phil Spector producing Love. Coxon also understands the show's based on a comic book, so his pastiche of different styles is similarly affectionate. No one could call the Morricone-esque *Dining Room Standoff* a parody, and the worst they'd say of *She Knows* is its quiet pianos and ragged guitars sound like *Song 2*-era Blur. F***ing great! ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

The Big Moon
WALKING LIKE WE DO
FICTION

Nominated for the Mercury Music Prize in 2017 for debut album *Love In The 4th Dimension*, the quartet expand on that hectic rock sound here without losing their gang mentality. *Don't Think* and *Holy Roller* set a high-water mark for huge pop tunes of the year, while *Waves* is like TLC if they'd paid their dues on the tiny gig circuit first. Celia Archer's bass bounces pleasingly through *Take A Piece* with the insouciance of Blur's Alex James at his most louche, while Juliette Jackson's harmonies are fearsomely addictive at every turn. The Big Moon's previous rattling indie still underpins the likes of *Barcelona* and *Your Light*, but *Walking Like We Do* is a brilliant example of a second album on which a band work out exactly who and what they want to be, no longer confined by their own or anyone else's expectations. *John Earls* **8**

Susumu Yokota
CLOUD HIDDEN
LO RECORDINGS

Given it's sourced from a forgotten DAT once sent to Mark Beazley of post-rock act Rothko, with whom Yokota collaborated in the early 2000s, it says much about the Japanese polymath, who died in 2015, that this record exists. Though some were developed for 2002's *The Boy And The Tree*, these unfinished tracks remained unreleased until Lo Recordings' Jon Tye decided to ready them. Though also known for his house music, these better suit Yokota's fascinating experimental catalogue, although some might dance to opener *Spectrum Of Love*'s Middle Eastern rhythms. *The Reality Of Reincarnation* offers chiming bells and zither strings circling a two-note bass riff, and *Ama And The Mountain* finds synths swirling heavenwards, while *Direct Transmissions* sounds like Eno at sea. *The Art Of Contemplation*, however, is optimistically titled. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

SebastiAn
THIRST
ED BANGER

On paper, the idea of Parisian pop techno Goliath, SebastiAn could be found irksome. For starters, he's in surname-denial, briefly nodding to it with that self-conscious stray capital A. Then there's the acting and the collaboration with fashion brand Saint Laurent. Already, readers might be tempted to insert him into the Nathan Barley category. But while he's undeniably a hipster, his distinctive lower-end growling bass and motion sickness rhythms are always convincing. It's been an eight-year wait for album #2 and it doesn't disappoint. With high-profile guest vocalists like Charlotte Gainsbourg and Sparks, along with newcomers like Londoner Bakar and US R&B singer Gallant (who sing standout tracks *Sober* and *Run For Me*) it could be patchy, but SebastiAn's sonic control stamps everything with a capital A. *Ben Wardle* **8**

The Innocence Mission
SEE YOU TOMORROW
BELLA UNION

The Innocence Mission's singer Karen Peris has said the songs on *See You Tomorrow* are in great part concerned with family life, with connectedness and worrying about "one's own ability to be a good enough helper and companion". It shows, in that there's both anxiety and fragility here, but an underlying toughness too – nobody ever said family life was easy. Over all soars the extraordinary voice of Peris, which finds unexpected melodies in tracks that build from simple and sturdy foundations yet, via rich and detailed arrangements, shimmer – as on the achingly lovely *On Your Side* and *I Would Be There*. A mere 30-plus years into The Innocence Mission's recording career, it's now time to start according the Pennsylvania trio the respect granted to fellow travellers such as Low and longtime fan Sufjan Stevens. It comes pressed on orange vinyl. ***Jonathan Wright*** **8**

Jack Peñate
AFTER YOU
XL

A decade ago, Jack Peñate overcame his roots as a Jamie T soundalike on his hypnotic second album *Everything Is New*. He promptly vanished for 10 years, a victim of severe writer's block. There's nothing groundbreaking as such on Penate's return, but the songs are rich and emotional enough to suggest a lot of care has been invested. *Cipralex* and haunting closer *Swept To The Sky* in particular are futuristic ballads a world away from the identikit singer-songwriter bores currently infesting the mainstream. It's not all serious struggles. When Peñate throws off his inner turmoil on *Murder* and *Round And Round*, you can't help cheer him on as he regains the emotive disco that made *Everything Is New* so special. Peñate might not rival Ty Segall for productivity, but what he does conjure up is to be cherished. *John Earls* **8**

Keaton Henson
SIX LETHARGIES
MERCURY KX

Though he started out in 2010 writing fragile folk songs, Keaton Henson's latest is a 70-minute work for strings. He premiered the material in 2018 at the Barbican, where his fascination with music's ability to affect one's mood led him to strap audience members to 'galvanic skin response monitors', which responded to their anxiety levels, thus controlling the stage's lighting. Like many New Classical composers, he's inspired by Henryk Górecki's 1976 *Symphony Of Sorrowful Songs*, with *Initium* slowly swelling towards an emotive climax, and by Arvo Pärt, whose Tintinnabuli works can be heard in the skeletal *Unease Concerto – Cadenza* and the calming *Breathing Out*. Unlike less adventurous contemporaries, however, Henson betrays no dependence upon arpeggios, least of all on *Trauma/In Chao*, which builds to a noisy, grotesque climax. ***Wyndham Wallace*** **8**

Georgia
SEEKING THRILLS
DOMINO

Georgia once described herself as "a bit of a melting pot," and as "post-punky hip-hop soul". In the years since then, the one-time child footballer, multi-instrumentalist and daughter of Leftfield's Neil Barnes, who used to drum for Kate Tempest, seems to have headed in a more pop-chasing trajectory. There's still a great deal of nuance and variety present on this record, but at its core it still feels like a move towards a more polished, gleaming and silk-smooth pop affair. The good news is, it suits her. The sparkling *About Work The Dancefloor* is an equally pop-centric and electronic banger that feels more in the style of Robyn; it's a highly successful attempt to merge pop smarts and dancefloor delirium from an accomplished performer. It's this dual state that the album exists in for the remainder, too. *Daniel Dylan Wray* **8**

Jim Noir
AM JAZZ
DOOK RECORDINGS

Fifteen years ago, Manchester-based Jim Noir, also known as Alan Roberts, looked a good outside bet for international superstardom. While this has never quite come to pass, it hasn't prevented him from periodically offering up albums so packed with pop melodies that sometimes-made comparisons with Brian Wilson seem only mildly fanciful. In truth, *AM Jazz*, his first offering since *Finnish Line* in 2014, may not widen his circle of admirers too greatly, but that's by no means to underplay its virtues. Mixing psychedelia, soft rock and electronica, and with a strong Beatles influence, there are plenty of standout moments, notably the jaunty *Good Mood* and the spiralling *Hexagons*. At times, you wish he would dial things up, maybe work more often with a band rather than recording largely alone, but it's still good to have Noir back. ***Jonathan Wright*** **6**

Ben Watt
STORM DAMAGE
UNMADE ROAD

The jazzy and folk-tinged surfaces of Everything But The Girl mainstay Ben Watt's fourth solo LP are misleading. Reflecting grief over the unexpected death of his half-brother in 2016, colliding with Britain's uneasy politics, it's a record that ranges lyrically across a landscape of deep mourning, observation of people's day-to-day struggles and righteous anger. The result of sessions featuring Watt, bassist Rex Horan and drummer Evan Jenkins, whose kit mixes vintage Ludwig drums and electronics, it's also a record that's far more ambitious sonically than it initially appears, an assured and beautifully executed exercise in using less-is-more sparseness to sustain atmosphere. Low's Alan Sparhawk adds delicate guitar and harmonies to *Irene*. It's available on mint green vinyl with a four-page booklet. *Jonathan Wright* **8**

Holy Fuck
DELETER
LAST GANG RECORDS

The opening track here, *Luxe*, featuring a guest appearance from Hot Chip's Alexis Taylor, is one of the finest things that Holy Fuck have ever committed to record. It's a genuinely glorious intermingling of pulsating electronics with Taylor's seamless knack for a melody – and a rhythm that feels as relentless and hard as it does smooth. This more colourful and lively approach to electronic music (that has often been referred to as dance punk) has waned somewhat in popularity in recent years, since sweary folks like Holy Fuck and Fuck Buttons felt at the helm of something new. However, here the outfit feel supercharged and rejuvenated. This is a thumping, funky record – and one that weaves from glistening euphoric melody to weirdo dance-rock and then back to squelchy sugary pop. *Daniel Dylan Wray* **8**

INXS
LIVE BABY LIVE WEMBLEY STADIUM THE SOUNDTRACK
UMC

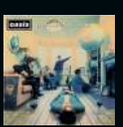
Not to be mistaken for 1991's *Live Baby Live*, this more precisely titled live album finds the Aussies playing to 74,000 fans, blowing their minds as much as their own. Indeed, Michael Hutchence begins grunting before Tim Farriss has started chopping the first of *Guns In The Sky*'s primitive riffs like logs, and he also ensures the similarly simple *I Need You Tonight* is as sexy as it's sweaty, while *New Sensation*'s unstoppable Chic-like riff is beyond irresistible. There are, however, a few reminders that INXS started out on the Australian pub circuit, with *Lately* bringing very little to the party and *Bitter Tears* plodding along in an amiable but forgettable fashion. Seriously, though: who's going to argue with a passionate *Never Tear Us Apart* and climactic *The Devil Inside*? ***Wyndham Wallace*** **7**

WHAT'S ON IN THE SHOP

TNT RECORDS
BARROW

IDLES
JOY AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE
PARTISAN

"Pretty much from the day we opened, this has been one of our top sellers. They're one of those bands that everyone seems to like at the moment. There is a bit of a punk revival happening, and there is plenty of demand for all the classic bands: the Sex Pistols, The Clash, etc, but IDLES probably sell as many records as them all combined."



Oasis
DEFINITELY MAYBE: 25TH ANNIVERSARY
BIG BROTHER

"It's a legendary album anyway, but since the anniversary edition was released a couple of months ago, it feels like everyone's been in for it. We're not a million miles from Manchester, so there's a huge following for that scene in Barrow. Luckily for us, I'm sure there'll be a 25th anniversary edition of *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?* next year!"

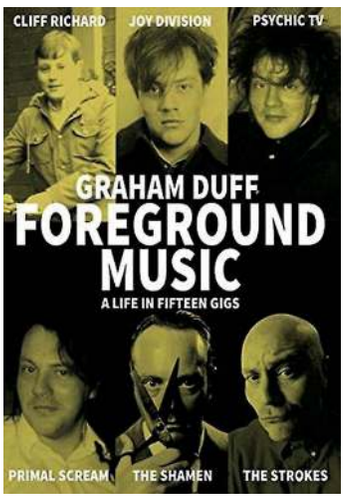
Gerry Cinnamon
ERRATIC CINEMATIC
LITTLE RUNAWAY

"I'll admit, I didn't realise how popular this guy was until we opened TNT. We sell this record before I can even get it on the shelf. He's played at our local festival, Kendal Calling, the last few years, so he seems to have a huge following in this area."

Foreground Music

GRAHAM DUFF

STRANGE ATTRACTOR PRESS £15.99



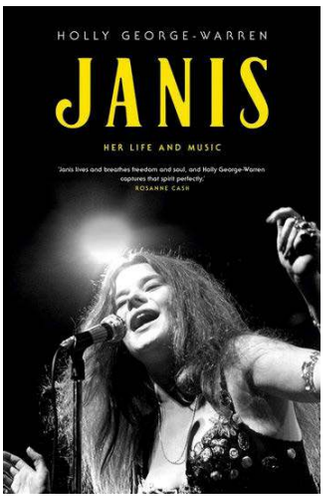
Prolific UK comedy screenwriter and script doctor Graham Duff (he wrote Johnny Vegas vehicle *Ideal*) has been going to gigs for over 40 years, and each chapter heading of his excellent memoir is dedicated to a gig that left an enduring impression on him. From a 'shit' Cliff Richard concert at King George's Hall in Blackburn, aged 10, to a momentous one watching personal favourites Wire in Brighton, aged 50, there are 15 gigs in all. These encompass not only Cliff and the wizen post-punks, but also The Jam, The Specials, Joy Division, Psychic TV, The Shamen, Primal Scream, The Velvet Underground, Sleater-Kinney, The Strokes, The Fall (Mark E Smith was an acquaintance), David Bowie and Massive Attack. Clearly Duff is a man of great musical taste, and his writing on the subject is vivid, funny and insightful. Much to his credit, *Foreground Music* succeeds both as a musical history and as a memoir, skipping across the passing decade's trends and subcultures as it celebrates the inspirational power of live music. *Gary Tipp*

8

Janis: Her Life And Music

HOLLY GEORGE-WARREN

SIMON & SCHUSTER £20



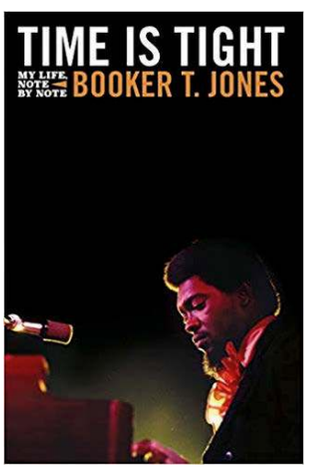
Janis Lyn Joplin's journey from a middle-class girl in the conservative city of Port Arthur, Texas to the very embodiment of the 60s counterculture is wonderfully well chronicled by seasoned biographer Holly George-Warren. As a youngster, Joplin was bullied for being different to the other girls, but as she got older those differences were celebrated, especially in San Francisco, where she was adopted as the city's unofficial queen. Joplin's vocal talent was extraordinary, and she is heralded as one of the most impassioned vocalists in the history of rock 'n' roll. She is also remembered for the uncompromising way she lived her life (Janis was photographed so often with a bottle of Southern Comfort in her hand that the company bought her a fur coat as a reward). Based on unprecedented access to Janis' family, friends, lovers, former bandmates and personal archives, George-Warren has gone a long way towards making her version of the Janis Joplin story as close to definitive as she can possibly get it. *GT*

9

Time Is Tight, My Life Note By Note

BOOKER T. JONES

OMNIBUS PRESS £20



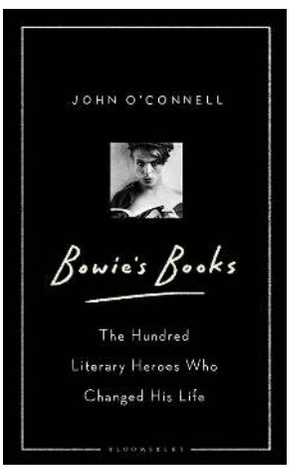
Cricket lovers of a certain vintage will instantly recall Booker T.'s music from the track *Soul Limbo*, the BBC's go-to theme tune for their coverage of the sport for many a year. While the great man barely mentions the sound of leather on willow in his much-awaited autobiography, the longevity of his career in music means he has an anecdote or two to go in its place. This is the man, for instance, who wrote *Green Onions*, his soul-rocking, cosmopolitan take on the blues, when he was just 16. Born Booker Taliaferro Jones Jr in Memphis on 12 November, 1944, Jones' musical talent was identified early and he recounts his early days in great detail; while still at school, he would deliver papers in the morning and play gigs in nightclubs in the evenings to support his family. While at hometown record label Stax, Jones formed the groundbreaking, multi-racial Booker T. And The M.G.'s, and collaborated with some of Southern Soul's giants, in the form of Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and Sam & Dave. Not only has the evergreen Booker T. got into the bookwriting game, he'll also be touring the UK later in the year. *GT*

7

Bowie's Books

JOHN O'CONNELL

BLOOMSBURY £16.99



To coincide with his remarkable retrospective at the V&A in 2013, voracious reader David Bowie released a fascinating list of 100 books that he regarded as the "most important and influential" to him as an artist (as opposed to a catalogue of his personal favourites). Subtitled *The Hundred Literary Heroes Who Changed His Life*, experienced writer John O'Connell has cleverly run with this list and turned it into a highly entertaining, witty and informative book. One of Bowie's strengths as a serious performing artist was that he always had a sharp repurposer's eye for a good idea/concept, which means the works on his list are made all the more tangible when attempting to relate them back to his art (whether that's directly or indirectly). O'Connell dedicates a short, incisive essay on each book on Bowie's list that not only links them to the great man, but also places them in a wider cultural context. The list provided evidence of Bowie's restless intelligence and revealed him as a man equally comfortable with both high (Homer, Dante, Camus) and low (*Viz*, *The Beano*) culture, which is an absolute godsend to O'Connell, allowing him to add the required amount of light and shade. *GT*

8

DREAM MACHINES

Pro-Ject
SIGNATURE 12

£8,000 www.henleyaudio.co.uk

Pro-Ject's flagship turntable is an audiophile marvel complete with a beast of a tonearm

This is Pro-Ject's top-of-the-range turntable. Notice the top of the platter – it's finished with melted vinyl records, negating the need for a mat and acting as an optimal platform for the turntable.

On the left is the fly-wheel motor mechanism, which uses "perpetual motion technology" for frictionless motor control.

Over to the right now, and the arm is 12" long, "…a beast in its own right," say the company and we don't disagree! With adjustments for every conceivable cartridge, it is made from specially selected materials and tuned to be as anti-resonant as possible. Start saving!

1 EM.DE.EF
The plinth is MDF, available in a host of luxury finish options, but is also packed with metal granulate inside for high-mass and zero resonance transference.

2 FLOAT, FLOAT ON
Pro-Ject combine the mass of the plinth and aluminium platter with magnetic technology (in the feet and the subplatter) to create a heavy turntable that "floats".

3 THE POSITIVE TOUCH
It's controlled with a neat touchscreen, and the speed can be stepped in small increments for perfect playback of any record.

2
Pro-Ject
3

The AT-LP140XP features Technics-like DJ tools, such as a platter strobe

Audio-Technica AT-LP140XP TURNTABLE

LONG LIVE VINYL EDITOR'S CHOICE

£379 eu.audio-technica.com

It looks like an updated version of the AT-LP120X. That's because it is. **Paul Rigby** takes note…

I'm regularly asked for buyer's advice on budget turntables. More often than not, those asking the questions will have a shortlist of desirable decks. Audio-Technica's ATLP120USB (£289) is often present within these lists. It's a fact that the company builds very popular turntable designs, seen by many as a shortcut to the iconic Technics 'look'. The classic presentation provides many audiophiles and vinyl lovers with a sense of DJ chic. A certain analogue edge that they don't see in a typical, minimalistic audiophile offering from the likes of Rega or Pro-Ject.

So, it's about time that I took a closer look – and I decided to do just that with Audio-Technica's latest entry.

The 140, just like the 120, provides the usual DJ tools. On the 140, you'll find a platter strobe/light, forward/reverse operation, variable pitch control and retractable light. This will generate some high-frequency noise and vibration from the resident DJ tools. Not a good thing if you prioritise sound quality.

THE CLASSIC PRESENTATION PROVIDES AUDIOPHILES AND VINYL LOVERS WITH A SENSE OF DJ CHIC

What the 140 doesn't give you, though, is a built-in phono amplifier and USB port for vinyl ripping. Instead, you get a meaty IEC power socket. This means that the kettle lead supplied with the 140 can be upgraded to something sonically superior. These changes, on a sonic level, are a good thing. So, in audiophile terms, there are swings and roundabouts here.

A three-speed machine (78rpm is included) and featuring a dust cover, the 140 includes the 120's S-shaped arm. According to my own enquiries, the 140 also includes an improved motor – one with higher torque and a heavier plinth, adding sonically enhancing damping.

The new AT-XP3 cartridge is supplied free. A DJ-specific design with a conical stylus tip, it features a V-Mount dual-magnet construction.

Finally, thumbs up to the platter on the 140, which includes a damping material underneath to reduce ringing. Undertaking listening tests, I looked at the cartridge first. Be aware, it is built with DJ use in mind; tracking is its main thing. Good tracking on an audiophile turntable is good, but too much is worrying.

Audio-Technica recommends 3g tracking force. Great for DJs, not so music audiophiles. I recommend backing off to 2g. Even better, do some experimenting to see what's best for you. You might, for example, prefer 2.2g. But 3g is over the top.

In fact, I would seriously encourage you to upgrade the cartridge to the company's own AT95e or similar, a cart with an elliptical stylus tip, to enhance detail.

I compared the 140 to a Lenco L-3808 (£200) and found that the 140 offers great air within the midrange, a larger soundstage and relatively subtle detail. At £379, the 140 should be better. Even so, it was a relief to find this was the case.

I then changed the cartridge to an Ortofon 2M Red and compared that with the original configuration. As expected, the 2M Red proved superior in sound terms, infused with extra space to allow further detail into the music. The 2M Red made the 140 sound almost elegant, in comparison to the original Audio-Technica DJ cartridge.

Comparing the 140 to Fluance's RT83 (which arrives with a 2M Red as part of its own package), the RT83 added complexity to the midrange, but the 140 was better in transient terms; the notion of notes starting and stopping on the dot. The RT83 provided a superior emotional performance, but the 140 offered more life and vitality in the vocals.

The 140 couldn't match the stellar Rega RP1 during tests. This specialist audiophile design remained sonically superior in all areas to the 140, on sound quality terms.

The Audio-Technica AT-LP140XP is primarily a lifestyle turntable and, therefore, should be judged as such. While it performs very well in sound quality terms, it's unfair to rate it purely on those grounds. Factor in its funky appearance and ability to do that Technics 'thing', as well as being sturdy and strong with the direct drive mechanism offering confident, secure bass. Mostly, though, the 140 is a whole lot of fun. We love it.

9

VERDICT

PROS	CONS
FOCUS	DJ TOOLS
CONFIDENT BASS	CARTRIDGE
SETUP	
UPGRADE POSSIBILITIES	

Chord Electronics' new phono preamp, the Huei, is an impressive performer

Chord Electronics HUEI

PHONO STAGE

£990 chordelectronics.co.uk

John Pickford assesses a compact phono stage for all cartridges

Ask many audiophiles if they've heard of Chord and you'll get the answer, "They make cables don't they?" However, Chord Electronics, not to be confused with the Chord Company, is a British manufacturer of high-quality analogue amplification and digital devices. Although the company is far from being a household name, its reputation is enviable; clients include Abbey Road Studios and The Royal Opera House.

Currently celebrating 30 years of trading, the company's latest product, the Huei, is a neat, compact phono stage expressing their expertise in both the analogue and digital domains. The signal path, as you would hope, is all-analogue. However, the many setting options, including a useful memory function, are controlled by a low-noise microprocessor.

Compatible with both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges, the Huei offers 12 impedance settings to suit any type of cartridge of any vintage. There is also a gain control with eight different gain settings for both MM and MC cartridges. The final feature to mention is a rumble filter, once a common sight on hi-fi amplifiers, but rarely seen today. Huei's filter is a Rausch Slope, designed to eliminate mechanical noise from the turntable.

These four main functions: MM/MC switch, Impedance, Gain and Rumble, are all controllable via colour-coded illuminated push-buttons on the Huei's top panel; the brightness of the LEDs can be adjusted to taste.

Connectivity on the rear panel comprises RCA inputs and outputs, with an option of XLR balanced output. A locking ground/earth pin is also provided and should be used to remove the hums and buzzes that your cartridge can produce.

Like all Chord Electronics products I've seen, the Huei is stylish and solidly built. The top panel incorporates a small window showing off the Huei's illuminated internal electronics, while the casework is precision machined from aircraft-grade aluminium billet, acknowledging the company's roots in aviation engineering. It's a small unit, measuring 41mmx160mmx 72mm (HWD), so it's easy to locate and can be placed discreetly out of sight if desired.

Setup is easy, armed with the supplied manual to show the colour coding of the various parameters and once optimally set, the memory function will default to your settings each time you power up. Users of MM cartridges need not worry about impedance settings, as moving magnets always operate with a set impedance of 47k ohms. As such, when in MM mode the impedance button does not illuminate and 47k omhs is selected automatically. Users of MC cartridges, however, should consult their cartridge's manual to determine the ideal impedance. In the case of my MC cartridge, the quoted impedance range is 100-47k ohms, the full range offered by the Huei, so I simply jog through the options until my ears tell me the 470 ohms setting produces the best sound.

Performance-wise, the Huei impresses from the get-go. Following an hour's warm-up, I settle down with several reliable test tracks to evaluate performance. In place of my reference valve phono stage, the solid-state Huei delivers a decidedly different sonic character. Whereas my valve unit produces an easy, musical sound that's fluid and smooth, if slightly dark, the Huei is all about precision and control. The unit is extremely quiet, with none of the gentle hiss and hum of my valves, while the music produced is both well ordered and finely etched.

Nick Drake's *Five Leaves Left* is lushly orchestrated, with Drake's plaintive vocals and delicate guitar to the fore. *Fruit Tree*'s acoustic guitar intro is delicate yet crisp, while the double bass underpinning it is more rounded and tighter than I'm used to hearing. Orchestral elements are conveyed convincingly, the oboe in particular sounding believable and lifelike.

Tonally, Huei is supremely neutral, sounding neither bright nor warm, as I discovered playing some of my cherished Blue Note jazz mono pressings. It's here, however, that the Huei's lack of a mono switch is noticed. Mono switches effectively eliminate groove noise when playing mono vinyl and I would have preferred to have one instead of (or as well as) the rumble filter.

The Huei is a great phono stage, offering true high-fidelity sound and precise set-up options in a small but funky package. It comes highly recommended. **9**

VERDICT

PROS	CONS
DETAILED SOUND & PRECISE STEREO IMAGING	NO MONO SWITCH
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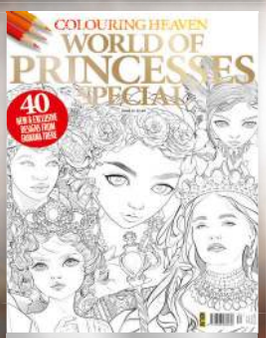

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CLOSER

VINYL'S GREATEST FINAL TRACKS

#8 GUNS N' ROSES
ROCKET QUEEN

Nice and sleazy does it for the end cut of the LA rockers' incendiary debut. **Gary Tipp** applies his hairspray

Closing tracks don't come much sleazier than the end cut on Guns N' Roses' breathtakingly brash debut album *Appetite For Destruction*. The track, *Rocket Queen*, was based around a recycled, vaguely funky riff that Slash and Duff McKagan brought into the studio from their short-lived band Road Crew. Lyrics were added by Axl Rose, but it's the uncredited backing groans, sorry, vocals from a 'close friend' of the band that caused the furore.

DIRTY MONKEY

As the shy, retiring Rose put it when interviewed in *Hit Parader* magazine back in 1988: "I wrote this song for this girl who was gonna have a band and she was gonna call it Rocket Queen. She kinda kept me alive for a while. The last part of the song is my message to this person, or anybody else who can get something out of it. It's like there's hope and a friendship note at the end of the song."

The girl in question, the cryptically implied *Rocket Queen* of the title, was the spectacularly named Barbie Von Grief, a notorious LA scenester and early benefactor of Rose's, who went on to become the madame of a Hollywood whorehouse. But wait, there's more, as dirty monkey Axl continues. "For that song, there was also something I tried to work out with various people, a recorded sex act. It was somewhat spontaneous but premeditated; something I wanted to put on the record." Ah, bless him.

Although the track was dedicated to Von Grief, who also receives an acknowledgment in the album's liner notes, the dubious privilege of performing a live 'studio recorded' sex act with the lead singer fell to Adriana Smith. The fact she was drummer Steven Adler's on-off girlfriend at the time simply wasn't regarded as an issue.

Smith was invited to a mixing session at Mediasound Studios in New York City and persuaded by Rose to contribute backing vocals in a less than conventional way. Smith replied that she would do it and was led off to a recording booth, "For the band, and a bottle of Jack Daniel's."

In fact, later on she went as far as saying, "I would do anything Axl asked me to do. He's fucking magical." When Adler discovered what (and who) had gone down, he was less than happy ("He freaked out," said Smith incredulously), but his former girlfriend's orgasmic exhortations were, nonetheless, laid down on the track.

Dumped promptly by Adler and no longer an acolyte of the band, Smith's life took a nosedive into drugs and booze before she managed to come out the other side many years later.

ONLY THE DRUMMER

Rocket Queen became an early live favourite, making its debut at The Troubadour in West Hollywood in September 1985, and has remained on the band's setlist ever since. Heaven knows what Steven Adler used to think about during his drum solo. ●

"I would do anything Axl asked me to do. He's fucking magical"

JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

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